



**Creating Jobs. Keeping Character.**

**RESOURCE TEAM REPORT**  
for  
**Wetumpka, Alabama**

October, 2016

# COMMENDATION

By the Governor of Alabama

**WHEREAS**, communities all around the state of Alabama have expressed interest in their revitalizing their historic cores and central business districts; and

**WHEREAS**, the citizens and officials in the community of Wetumpka, Alabama have rallied together and organized to compete for the right to participate in the program through demonstration of commitment to the Four-Point Approach of the National Main Street Center; implementation of a successful program of organization, design, promotion, and economic vitality for their central business district; and dedication to become a successful model of downtown revitalization for the state; and

**WHEREAS**, the community of Wetumpka, Alabama will embark on a revitalization program unique to their hometown guided by the Main Street Alabama program and local leadership joining 16 other communities across the state of Alabama; and

**WHEREAS**, Wetumpka, Alabama celebrates its historic downtown commercial core and hopes to serve as an inspiration to other communities in this great state:

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Robert Bentley, Governor of the State of Alabama, do hereby make commendation to the community of Wetumpka, Alabama for becoming a

Main Street Alabama

Designated Community

On this, the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of August, 2016.



Creating Jobs. Keeping Character.

Dear Wetumpka Friends:

First, on behalf of the team of Marylon Barkan, Trisha Black, Jay Schlinsog, Randy Wilson, and Mary Helmer, we want to thank you for the wonderful welcome to your community! It has truly been our pleasure to visit with you and get to know more about you individually, the Wetumpka community, and of course, downtown.

We want to offer our sincere appreciation to those who took time away from their businesses, jobs, and families to share with us their knowledge, perceptions, desires and wildest dreams for downtown Wetumpka. It is because of your honesty and commitment to your downtown and community that we have been able to put together this completed Resource Team document.

As the team met with you September 20 - 22, 2016, we were impressed by downtown Wetumpka and its potential. We were excited by the individuals that participated with us in the vision session. The conversations were open and honest and showed an ability to take a hard look at what current conditions in downtown are, and then to not let that stop you from seeing what could be! There were moments of spontaneous laughter throughout the evening, and there were even some widely varying positions on what the future downtown should be like, but once the voting was done it was apparent that a majority agreed on a single vision for downtown Wetumpka.

From our perspective as a team, we observed many positive things about your community. I would like to share our less than comprehensive list of assets we see in Wetumpka.

**People** – We so appreciated the outstanding people who attended the vision session and our focus groups. One of the things that is so important is the ability to look at one's self honestly, and the people of Wetumpka can do that. They can also look past the negatives and see a future for the district. The best thing we noticed was the energy level and excitement from those who had left Wetumpka and returned home again to work, live and play in your hometown. We believe that those who live in and love Wetumpka will support the efforts and roll up their sleeves and get to work to accomplish the dream.

**Location & History** – Wetumpka (an Indian term meaning rumbling waters) is Located in Elmore County. Selected as county seat in 1866, Wetumpka is still the economic center of Elmore County and remains the county seat. Situated on the banks of the Coosa River, Wetumpka provides visitors and residents with a view of the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The city has a mayor-council form of government. Wetumpka's history traces its roots back to the Indian, French, and British inhabitants of the area.

Like much of the rest of the state, Wetumpka suffered a severe economic downturn during and after the Civil War; its population declined from 3,000 in 1875 to only 619 in 1879. Wetumpka rebuilt itself slowly throughout the early twentieth century. The city built a new jail, established electrical power and a public water supply, replaced wooden-plank sidewalks with concrete ones, and constructed a post office. By 1931, the Bibb Graves Bridge was completed. A landmark for the town, the bridge is one of only two in Alabama that is suspended by reinforced concrete. Overcoming fires and floods, by 1950 Wetumpka was the established economic center of the county.

**Businesses** – Downtown Wetumpka has a nice stock of buildings, some historic with potential to house several new businesses we found encouraging. The downtown business mix includes retail, dining, office and services uses that cater to the local and county market, visitors, downtown area employees and business revolving around the Elmore County Courthouse. Some of downtown businesses need strengthening and better marketing and vacant buildings need to be addressed. Being anchored by the Elmore County Courthouse, the Coosa River and the Crater is a great advantage.

**Promotion** – Wetumpka's proximity and connectivity to the natural resources of the area are outstanding! Annual special events include Christmas on the Coosa, the Coosa River Whitewater Festival, Frontier Days, Riverfest, Earth Day, Adventure Race, CraterFest and the Coosa River Challenge. The Windcreek Casino also brings visitors. Great opportunities are ahead to cross promote those amenities with downtown events.

**Buildings** – Downtown Wetumpka has a small but unique stock of historic buildings in the district. It is easy to see the potential that lies in the downtown. Even those buildings that are underutilized are full of opportunity, with the right mix of marketing, the right mix of businesses, investment in dilapidated buildings and some elbow grease.

Wetumpka is ready to succeed with their Main Street Program! Be ready to see yourselves with a bit of a critical eye, and take positive steps to build on the assets listed above, and to roll up your sleeves and get to work. Opportunity is knocking – open the door!

Best regards,

*Mary M Helmer*

Mary M. Helmer, CMSM  
President/State Coordinator, Main Street Alabama

# **WETUMPKA RESOURCE REPORT 2016**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION & STRATEGIC VISIONING

ORGANIZATION

PROMOTION

ECONOMIC VITALITY

DESIGN

# INTRODUCTION

## **Wetumpka – a Main Street Community**

**Wetumpka** is a city in and the county seat of Elmore County, Alabama, United States. At the 2010 census the population was 6,528. In the early 21st century, Elmore County, long a rural area, became one of the fastest-growing counties in the state. The city is considered part of the Montgomery Metropolitan Area. Wetumpka identifies as "The City of Natural Beauty". Among the notable landmarks are the Wetumpka Impact Crater and the Jasmine Hill Gardens, with a full-sized replica of the Temple of Hera of Olympia, Greece.

Historic downtown Wetumpka was developed on both sides of the Coosa River, and Fort Toulouse was built near it. Downtown Wetumpka is located on the banks of the Coosa River where rocks and rapids halt all navigation northward. The Coosa joins the Tallapoosa River just south of town to form the Alabama River providing a navigable water route to the Gulf of Mexico. The city sits in the scenic, southern foothills of the Appalachian Mountains with elevation ranging from a low point of 150 feet above sea level on the west side of the Coosa River to a high point of 540 feet on Bald Knob Mountain, the eroded remains of a meteorite crater which blasted into the bedrock millions of years ago.

## **Demographics**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 10.5 square miles with a population of 6,528, median age of 38, and a median household income of \$35,536. The immediate areas on Highways 231 & 14 have seen some retail & industrial development. Nationally consumer spending is shifting to locally owned businesses for unique items, excellent customer service and experiential shopping that "big box" stores do not offer. That is a good indicator for downtown Wetumpka. Downtown revitalization is a stated need in the community.

The Wetumpka Main Street Taskforce planning group has been working through the process of building support and creating a foundation from which to build. Members of the community are enthusiastic, and ready and willing to give and serve to contribute to the on-going process of downtown revitalization through their newly designated status as a Main Street Alabama City. As a newly designated Main Street Alabama City, Downtown Wetumpka can expect significant improvement in five years (depending on how hard the community chooses to work). It is important to realize that improvement comes in many different forms and that successes should be celebrated in all areas of the Main Street Approach.

## **Purpose**

The Resource Team report is a service provided by the Main Street Alabama Program to guide downtown Wetumpka's local revitalization efforts through the first years of the program's designation and beyond. The Resource Team provides these recommendations to Wetumpka Main Street based on the Main Street Four-Point Approach. This is a recommended course of action with specific activities for each of the four committees.

## **Acknowledgements and Thanks**

September 20 - 22, 2016, was an intensive three days full of meetings, interviews, and a community visioning session. A special thanks to Mayor Jerry Willis, Lynn Weldon, David Robison, Dennis Fain, Johnny Oates, Troy Stubbs and all the members of the Wetumpka Main Street Taskforce for planning the details of the resource visit, as requested of them. Also, our appreciation to the City of Wetumpka, City Council and Staff for their commitment and total involvement in the downtown revitalization efforts. Last, but not least, thank you to all of those who participated in the interviews, meetings, and community visioning session. Without your input, none of this would be possible.

## **Team Members**

The Resource Team members who conducted the on-site information gathering, analysis, and preparation of this report include: Marylon Barkan, Main Street Alabama, Trisha Black, Main Street Alabama, Jay Schlinsog, Downtown Professionals Network, Randy Wilson, Community Design Solutions, and Mary Helmer, Main Street Alabama President/State Coordinator.

## **Team Process**

Recommendations are based on information gathered from the Wetumpka community through a review of existing publications, interviews, tours, meetings, and a facilitated community visioning session.

## **Main Street Approach**

The Main Street Approach is a process through which the four points are integrated into a comprehensive program designed to build upon local opportunities and to build community self-reliance for business district economic development. This involves not only attention to all four points of the Main Street Approach, but also careful adaptation of the Main Street Approach to each community's specific needs. This visit was comprehensive and the team's investigation, observations, recommendations, and presentation follows the Main Street Four-Point Approach to downtown revitalization:

**Organization:** A strong organizational foundation is key for a sustainable Main Street revitalization effort. This can take many forms, from a stand-alone non-profit organization, to a special assessment district, to a program housed in a municipality or existing community development entity. Regardless of the organizational type, the focus is on ensuring that all organizational resources (partners, funding, volunteers) are mobilized to effectively implement transformative strategies.

**Economic Vitality** Revitalizing a downtown or neighborhood commercial district requires focusing on the underlying Economic Vitality of the district. This work is rooted in a commitment to making the most of a community's unique sense of place and existing historic assets, harnessing local economic opportunity and creating a supportive business environment for small business owners and the growing scores of entrepreneurs, innovators, and localists alike. With the nation-wide growing interest in living downtown, supporting downtown housing is also a key element of building Economic Vitality.

**Promotion** Promoting Main Street takes many forms, but the ultimate goal is to position the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and the hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics. This can be done through highlighting cultural traditions, celebrating architecture and history, encouraging local businesses to market cooperatively, offering coordinated specials and sales, and hosting special events aimed at changing perceptions of the district and communicating to residents, investors, businesses and property-owners that this place is special.

**Design** A focus on Design supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical elements of downtown while capitalizing on the unique historic assets that set the commercial district apart. Main Streets enhance their appeal to residents and visitors alike with attention to public space through the creation of pedestrian friendly streets, inclusion of public art in unexpected areas, visual merchandising, adaptive reuse of older and historic buildings, more efficiently-designed buildings, transit oriented development, and much more.

### **Eight Guiding Principles of Main Street**

While the Main Street approach provides the format for successful revitalization, implementation of the Four-Point Approach is based on eight principles that pertain to the entire revitalization effort:

**Comprehensive.** Downtown revitalization is a complex process and cannot be accomplished through a single project. For successful long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach must be utilized.

**Incremental.** Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help to develop skills so that more complex problems can be addressed and more ambitious projects can be undertaken.

**Self-Help.** Local leaders must have the desire and will to make the project successful. The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center and the Main Street Alabama Program provide direction, ideas and training, but continued and long-term success depend upon the involvement and commitment of the community.

**Public/Private Partnership.** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the economic health and physical viability of the downtown. Each sector has a role to play, and each must understand others strengths and limitations so that an effective partnership can be forged.

**Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets.** Downtown districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities--like the distinctive buildings and human scale environment that give people a sense of place. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.

**Quality.** Quality must be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies equally to each element of the program, from storefront design to promotional campaigns to educational programs.

**Implementation-Oriented.** Activity creates confidence in the program and ever greater levels of participation. Frequent visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger activities as the revitalization effort matures.

**Change.** Changes in attitude and practice are necessary to improve current economic conditions. Public support for change will build as the program grows.

### **National Main Street Accreditation Recognition**

The National Main Street Program recognition process evaluates established commercial district revitalization programs on the basis of ten basic performance standards and provides national recognition to those that meet these standards. The ten performance standards provide benchmarks and guidelines on how the organization should be functioning and an incentive to organizations to perform better and be more effective. You will be eligible for this after the completion of your first year. Main Street Alabama staff will evaluate your program and make appropriate recommendation(s) to the National Main Street Center.

Overall goals are to provide national and local visibility to local Main Street programs which understand and fully utilize the Main Street Four-Point Approach and eight Main Street principles and which continue to evolve organizationally to meet new challenges; to provide national standards for performance for Main Street programs; and to provide realistic goals and a tangible incentive for local Main Street programs which do not yet meet the criteria for national recognition. The benefits of receiving the recognition of the National Main Street Program are meant to reward organizations and provide attention within their community. Designees receive a certificate and a special press release to be used locally to promote their designation. Those that attend National Town Meeting from the community receive a special ribbon for their name badge. National Main Street Programs are also listed on the National Main Street Center's website. However, the ultimate benefit is a much stronger and better functioning organization.

### **Ten Performance Standards**

1. Broad-based public support for the commercial district revitalization process, with strong support from both the public and private sectors.
2. Vision and mission statements relevant to community conditions and the local Main Street Programs organizational stage.
3. Comprehensive Main Street work plan providing detailed blueprint from activities, reinforcing the program's accountability and providing objectives by which the program can track success.
4. Historic Preservation ethic.
5. Working board of directors and committees
6. Adequate operating budget.
7. Paid, professional program director.
8. Program of ongoing training for staff and volunteers.
9. Reporting of key statistics.
10. Current member of the National Main Street network.

## **Strategic Visioning**

Strategic Visioning has a power that is grounded in its ability to move us toward the future in a profound way. It is a deep sense of purpose for what your downtown stands for and what your organization is striving to create. Vision provides meaning in our lives by describing who we are and what we want to become – a portrayal – a vivid description of your desired future. With Vision, you can build a bridge between the present conditions and the future you want to create.

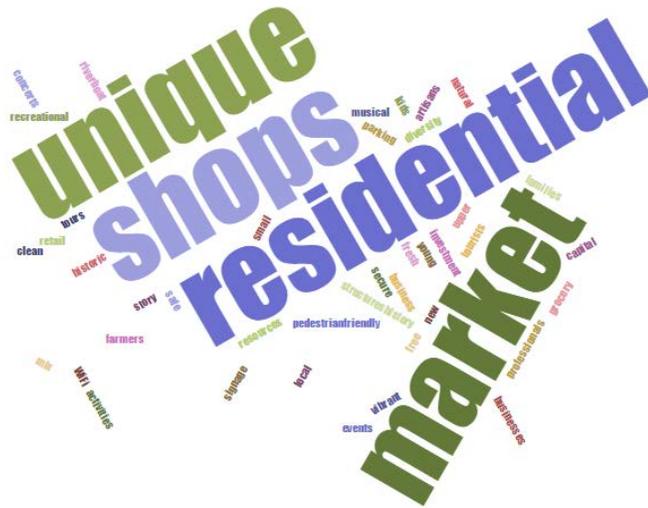
Your Vision is a picture of the outcome you seek and the results you want to achieve. It is the creation from which more immediate goals and a plan of action should be derived. This is the basis for how you (your program, your downtown) grows and evolves. It should span five years which serves to keep you focused and enables you to translate this purpose into do-able activities. In order for dreams and desires to inspire you to action and achievement, they need to be big. If you don't get excited about what you have planned for the future, you will never find the inspiration you need to motivate yourself and others to make change. Powerful dreams can move the soul, and when you dream the big dream, you will be driven to make the compelling picture a tangible reality. If you skip the visioning step, you're left with little that will inspire action or direct an effective change process. Motivation happens when the vision aligns with the "partners" needs and wants. This will give you and your partners the drive and determination to put all of your heart, mind, and effort into moving yourselves in the direction you want to achieve – your vision.

### **Vision is:**

A deep sense of purpose for what an organization stands for and strives to create:

- Inspires action
- Infuses passion
- Aligns individuals to the purpose
- Helps people to rise above their fears of current reality
- Embodies highest values and aspirations
  - ✓ Excellence
  - ✓ Service
  - ✓ Community

The following vision was composed from the words and desires of the people who were at the public visioning session. The Wetumpka Main Street Program and all of the community partners will use this vision to guide the work that takes place in the downtown and any community activities that affect the downtown area.



## 2021 Wetumpka Main Street Vision

Downtown Wetumpka is known for abundant natural resources allowing for a great variety of recreational opportunities, the rich history of the area and well maintained historic structures throughout the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. Families, young professionals and tourists all enjoy the fresh, clean and vibrant downtown atmosphere. The newly renovated streetscape has made the downtown pedestrian friendly, safe and secure. Attractive wayfinding signage leads visitors off the 231 bypass to enjoy unique shops with local artisans, weekly farmers market, child friendly activities, musical events, concerts and riverboat tours.

Utilizing an outstanding downtown masterplan, the community is united in both the public and private sectors to implement that plan, resulting in quality downtown redevelopment projects that attract both businesses and customers. Leveraged funding sources have been researched and are readily accessed to get the projects completed. Efforts are focused on filling vacant buildings and maximizing space in others, with retail and personal services on the lower levels. Capitalizing on the nationwide growing interest in living upstairs downtown, development of market rate loft apartments has reawakened the once vacant upper stories in the downtown district. Free Wi-Fi, ample parking and a small downtown market/grocery are luxuries downtown residents, employees and visitors enjoy.

A unified, cohesive marketing approach has rekindled community pride and conversation. Local interest is high, volunteers are welcomed and embraced for their enthusiasm to make Wetumpka the best it can be! It is understood that in the past there has been resistance to change and skepticism to new initiatives, but now is the time to move forward with new enthusiasm and energy! Downtown Wetumpka is the social and economic heartbeat of the city and a source of pride for all who live here!