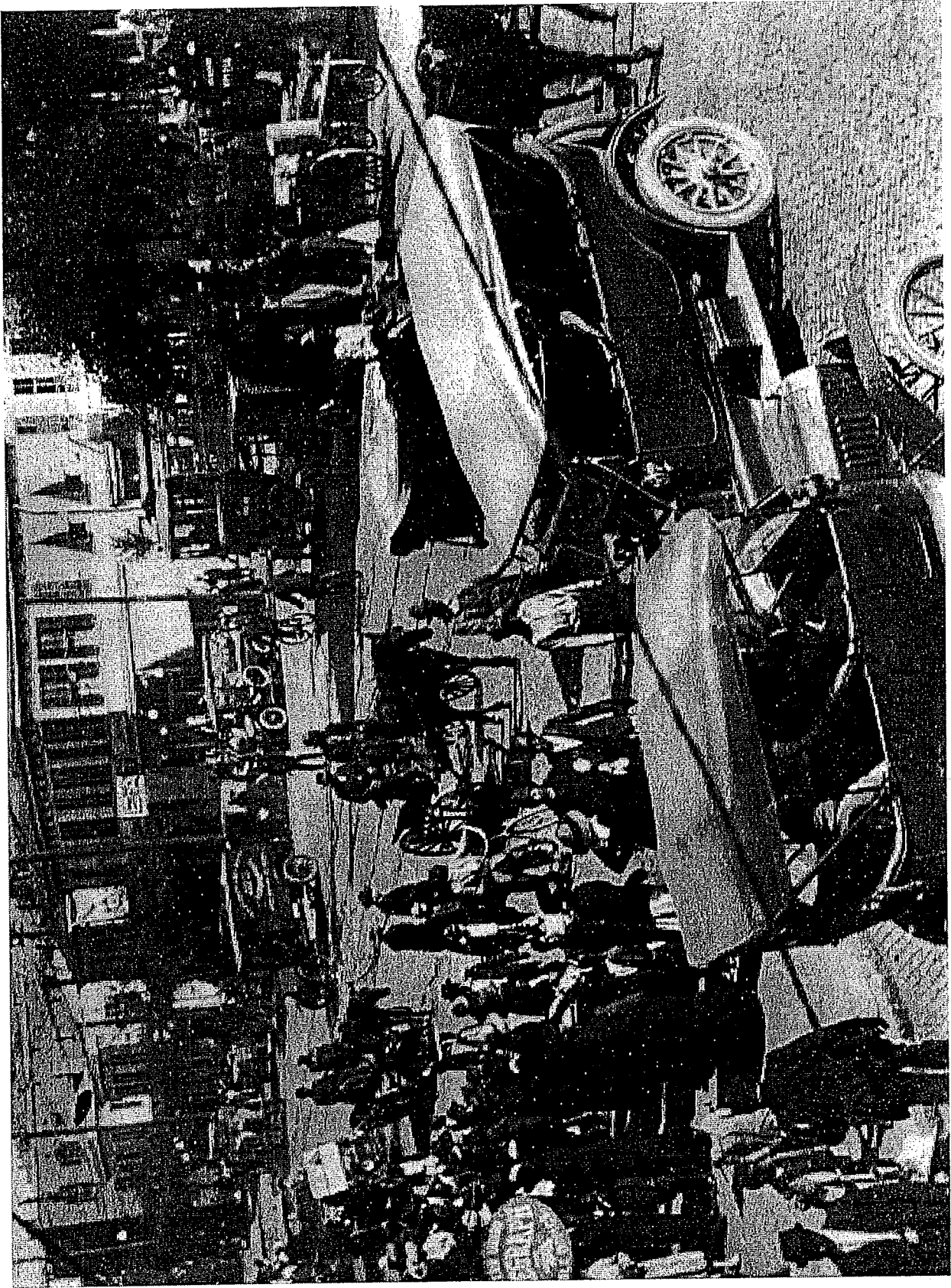


Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard & Montgomery Street Corridor

Revitalization Plan Final Report 1998



The MLK/Montgomery Corridor
Revitalization Plan
was prepared by the

Savannah Development and Renewal Authority
in conjunction with
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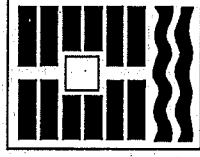
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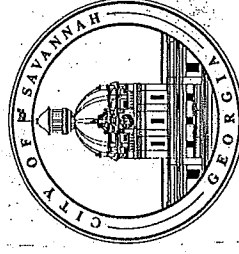
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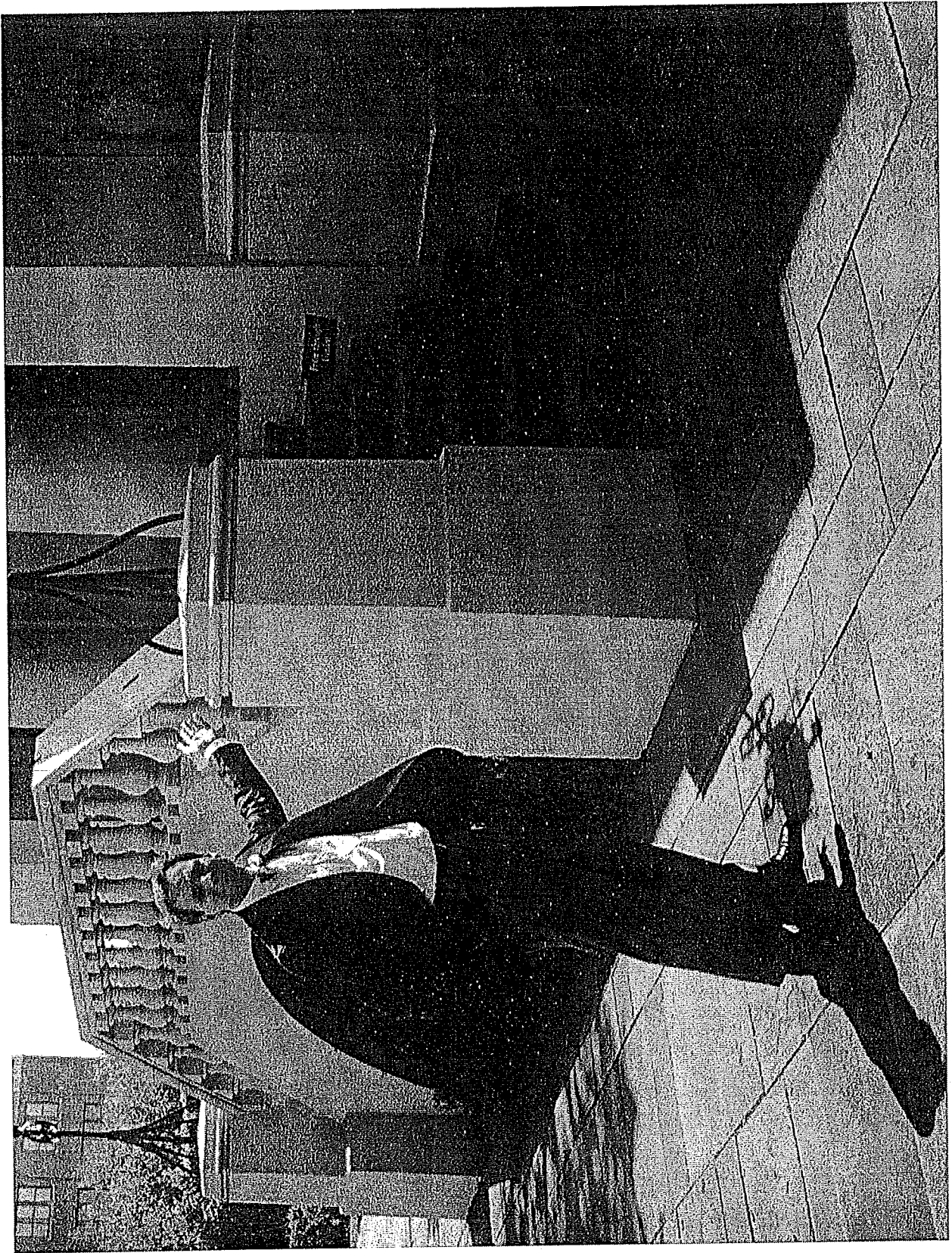


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Introduction



A: **Purpose**

The primary purpose of this plan is to identify physical development scenarios for the Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard/Montgomery Street Corridor, a distressed urban area on the west side of Savannah's National Historic Landmark District. The scope of this plan is intentionally narrow, focusing on a five to ten year time frame with a somewhat longer horizon for certain major projects. The local community assisted the consultant in defining a ten-year vision for the corridor upon which the development scenarios are founded. In addition to its emphasis on physical development strategies, the plan also addresses certain management and marketing strategies needed to encourage new private investment in the corridor. This plan is intended to be a blueprint for action, but also one that remains flexible as change occurs.

The SDRA will present this plan to the City Council, County Commission, and Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) anticipating that all three bodies will adopt the plan and use it in formulating future public policy. By marketing the plan to private stakeholders, the SDRA will stimulate private investment and strengthen the sense of community in the various segments of the corridor.

In addition to implementing economic development strategies for Downtown, one of the primary responsibilities of the Savannah Development and Renewal Authority (SDRA) is creating a comprehensive plan for Downtown. The Authority

carries out its planning responsibility using a process called Coordinated Strategic Planning. Since beginning operations in 1993, the SDRA has completed several components of the Coordinated Strategic Plan on strategic topics ranging from parking to a public market. As each component plan is completed, it is reconciled with the prior components and becomes part of the compendium of plans that make up the Coordinated Strategic Plan. This Revitalization Plan for the MLK/Montgomery Corridor is a major component of that comprehensive plan.

B: **Planning Process and Methods**

The Savannah Development and Renewal Authority believes in planning with the community, not planning for the community. That is why the Authority attempts to involve all interested stakeholders in designing and reviewing all components of the Coordinated Strategic Plan for Downtown Savannah. This approach was helpful in preparing the MLK/Montgomery Corridor Revitalization Plan.

Between October 1995 and August 1997, the MPC and SDRA hosted several public meetings with local residents, business owners, property owners, community leaders, and government agencies. These meetings identified numerous issues and concerns that were addressed by the consultant in both a zoning plan and the corridor revitalization plan.

During the revitalization planning process, the SDRA hosted two town hall meetings. These sessions attracted approximately 150

Savannahians and were thoroughly covered by the local news media. At the first town hall meeting, April 2, 1997, the consultant outlined his initial observations and preliminary recommendations and invited comments and suggestions from those attending. This presentation near the beginning of the planning process was especially useful in providing the community a voice in the overall planning process. The public comments and ideas generated at this first meeting gave interested citizens the opportunity to share in the development of a vision statement for the corridor. At the second town hall meeting, August 7, 1997, the consultant presented his conclusions and recommendations. Numerous comments and reactions from the audience helped clarify the consultant's specific recommendations.

Between the two town hall meetings, the SDRA organized a series of small focus groups between June 2 and June 13, 1997. Held at various locations along the corridor, these three meetings brought together small groups of stakeholders in the three segments of the corridor to discuss more detailed suggestions about the localized revitalization in each segment.

Many of the ideas generated by these public forums were incorporated into the plan, and the comments and reactions to his proposals informed the consultant about the community's priorities. Throughout the planning process, the SDRA's MLK/Montgomery Corridor Committee, as well as individual members of the staff and board of the SDRA, provided critical input and guidance to the consultant. The intense stakeholder involvement resulted in a solid plan.

C: Context of Plan

The Metropolitan Planning Commission's (MPC) Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard/Montgomery Street Corridor Advisory Committee Prepares a Zoning Improvement Plan

In October 1995, the Metropolitan Planning Commission completed a proposal for zoning improvements along the MLK/Montgomery Corridor. The zoning plan was prepared with guidance and oversight by the MPC's MLK/Montgomery Street Corridor Advisory Committee. The volunteer-led advisory committee worked for almost a year on its recommendations. Near the end of this process, the MPC contracted with Cy Paumier, a principal with LDR International, to advise the MPC staff and the advisory committee on the details of the zoning plan and to assist with the final negotiations, and conclude to the planning process.

In December 1995, Savannah City Council approved the MPC's proposed zoning improvements for the corridor.

A product of the zoning improvement plan was the MLK/Montgomery Street Corridor Existing Conditions Survey, which provided an overview of existing conditions along the corridor and outlined key issues raised by the advisory committee. The issues addressed included traffic, signs, utilities, landscape planning, infill for vacant lots, street lighting, existing occupancy and cultural resources. The MPC survey provided baseline information for the SDRA's subsequent revitalization plan.

The MLK Boulevard Revitalization and Redevelopment Task Force Emerges

As the Metropolitan Planning Commission advisory committee completed its work, the Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard Redevelopment and Revitalization Task Force emerged. In October 1995, civic leaders, business owners, and Downtown residents concerned about economic conditions in this once-thriving corridor came together to create the task force. The task force grew out of a series of four meetings facilitated by staff from the City of Savannah's Public Development Bureau.

The task force proposed launching a new, special-purpose authority to undertake the revitalization of MLK. Because of the history of the street, and a perceived lack of enthusiasm shown by other agencies in Downtown Savannah, many task force members felt the revitalization should be led by African Americans. They believed a special-purpose revitalization authority would place a high priority on the development and preservation of the boulevard.

The task force continued to meet on a regular basis with hopes of creating an effective and sustainable development authority. They proposed an organizational structure, general goals and strategies, and a plan for financial resources and presented the proposal to Mayor-Elect Floyd Adams, Jr. in late 1995.

The City Asks the Savannah Development and Renewal Authority to Lead the Project

At the urging of Mayor Adams, a new MLK/Montgomery Revitalization Program housed within the Savannah Development and Renewal Authority was negotiated in lieu of developing an additional special-purpose development authority. The Mayor perceived that the mission and goals of the proposed development authority were similar to those of the SDRA, and that with the SDRA a structure was already in place. The spring of 1996 was spent negotiating the details of combining the two groups. In the summer of 1996, the Board of Directors of the SDRA was augmented with the appointment of several members of the MLK Redevelopment and Revitalization Task Force. The SDRA created a MLK/Montgomery Street Corridor Revitalization Committee, and the Authority began work on developing an action plan.

The Program Is Funded and the Planning Initiative Begins

At the end of 1996, the City Council allocated additional funds to the SDRA for the MLK/Montgomery Corridor Revitalization Project including a small line item for planning. The SDRA contracted with Cy Paumier of LDR International, because of his experience with the recent zoning improvement plan for the MPC. The scope of the revitalization plan was deliberately narrow and focused on development scenarios for the next five to ten years. As the planning began, the SDRA moved forward with hiring additional staff and launching several short-term projects, such as the MLK Facade Improvement Program.

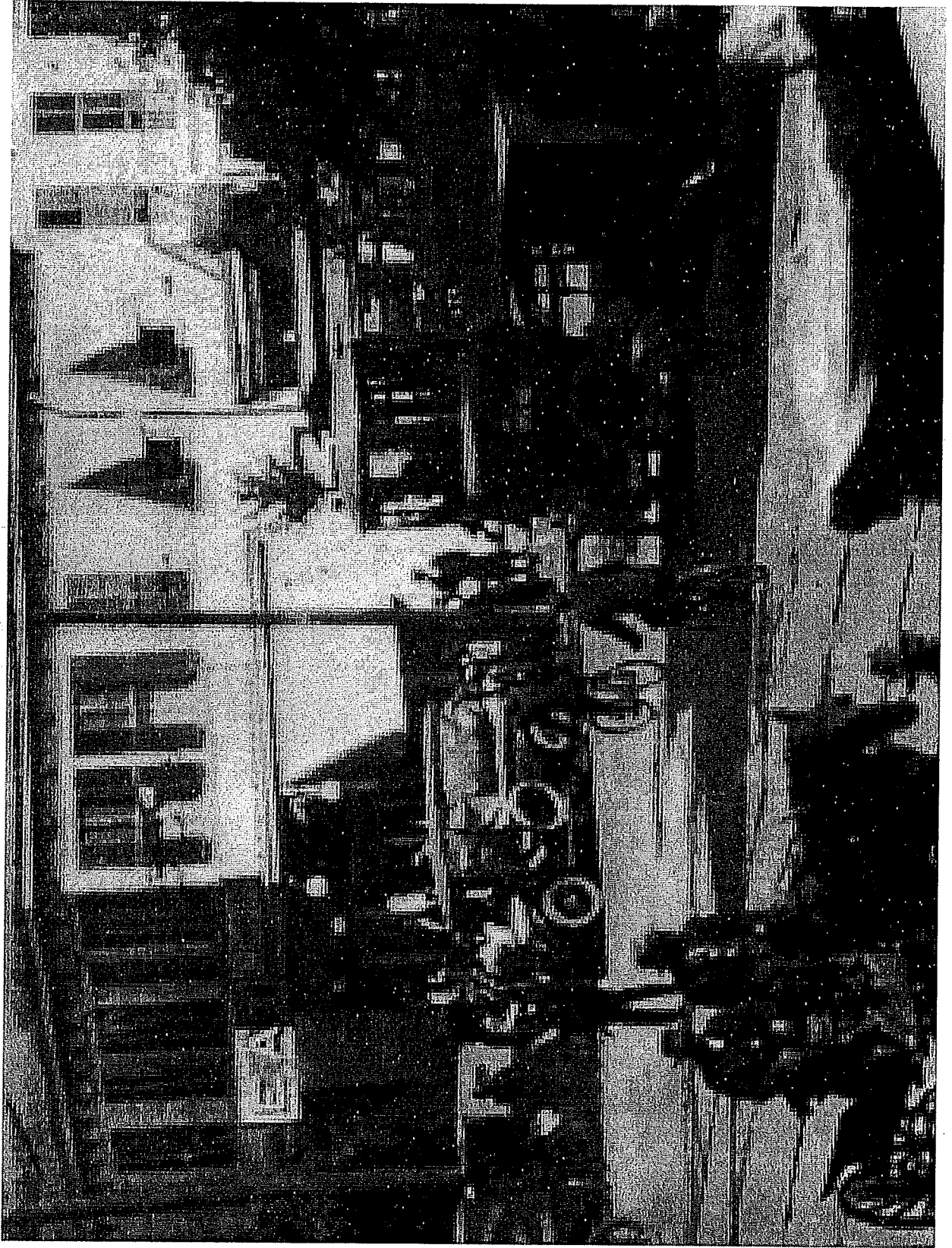
Vision Statement

Ten Year Vision for the Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard/Montgomery Street Corridor

By 2007, the corridor will be:

- An attractive and welcoming gateway into Downtown Savannah and an integral part of the National Historic Landmark District;
- A showcase of restored historic buildings and handsome infill construction reflecting the pride that Savannahians feel for their architectural heritage;
- A district filled with museums and restored historic sites to tell the stories of the people, events, and ideas which originated in this corridor and helped shaped the destiny of this community and the world beyond;
- A center for tourism with a variety of hotels and visitor services to complement the wide array of attractions;
- A safe, clean, and attractive area where businesses are welcome and residents feel at home;
- A neighborhood for educational, cultural, religious, and governmental institutions;
- A corridor with several vibrant retail clusters; offering a mixture of services, quality shopping, and entertainment choices that appeal to people of all ethnic, age, and income groups;
- A major transportation axis that balances the need to move large volumes of auto traffic with the benefits of excellent pedestrian amenities, first-rate public transit, and convenient parking options; and
- A testament to the historic role that African Americans played in the development of this neighborhood and our city, and a corridor that will emphasize economic opportunity for African American entrepreneurs and employees who want to build on this legacy.

Historic Significance of the Corridor



Since Colonial days, West Broad Street (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard) has been an important artery of industry and trade for Savannah, Georgia and the Southeast. The first paved street in the city, its importance as a transportation link with the nation increased in the mid-1800's, when cotton became king and the Central of Georgia Railroad connected landlocked areas of the nation with the thriving port of Savannah.

West Broad Street was the site of several businesses owned by pre-Civil War Savannah's large free African American population. From the 1920's until its decline in the 1970's, West Broad Street was a thriving business corridor that included businesses owned by individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and cultures.

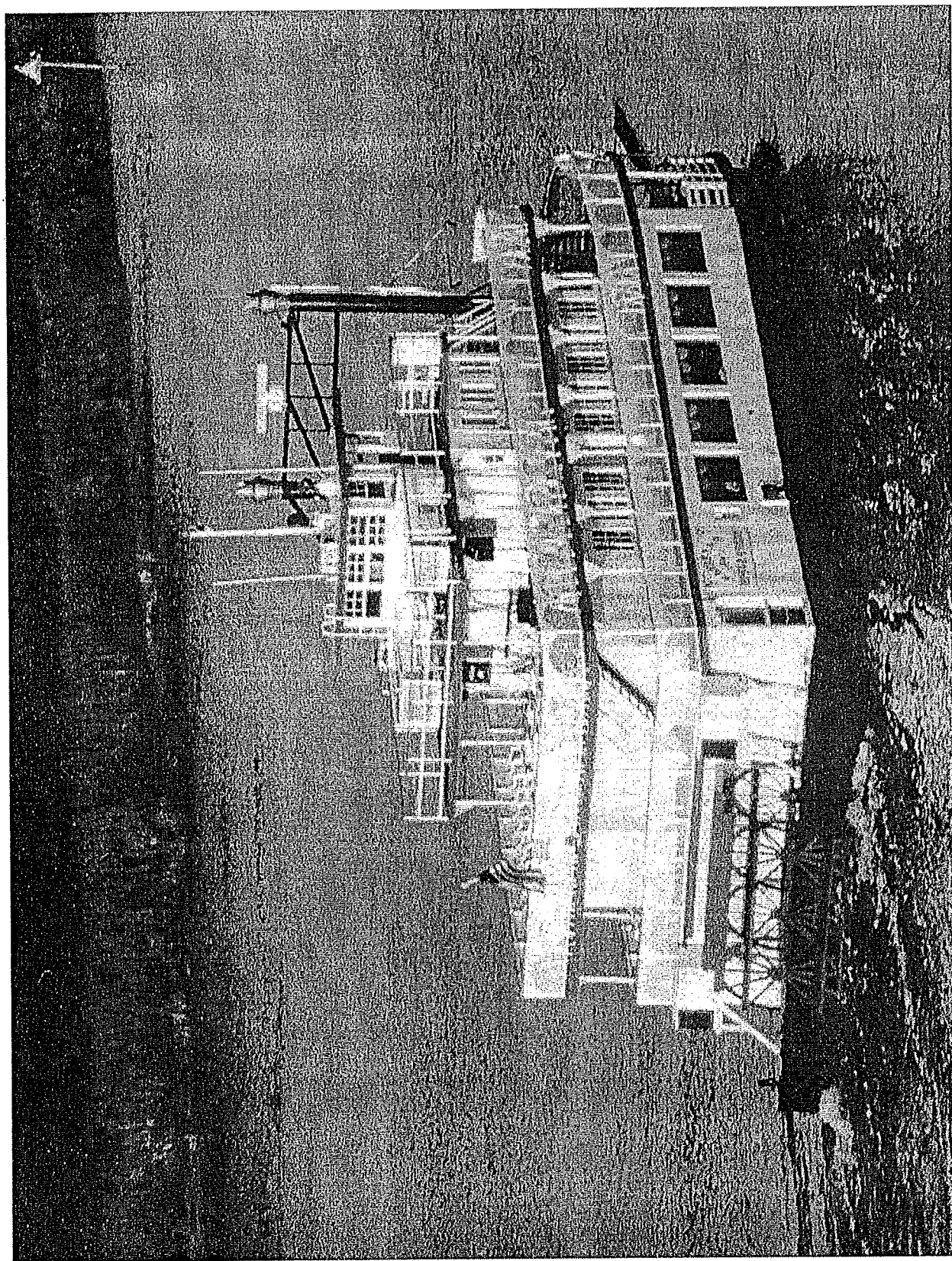
During segregation, West Broad Street was a center of commerce to the African American community. Many residents who may not have had access to needed products and services elsewhere saw the corridor as the "heart" of Downtown Savannah. African Americans owned banks, insurance companies, restaurants, movie theaters, barber shops, salons, night clubs, and professional offices, among others. The old West Broad Street YMCA anchored the corridor. Montgomery Street evolved as a neighborhood commercial street, less bustling than West Broad, but with its own viable mixture of homes and businesses. In the mid-20th century, Montgomery Street also became an axis for automobile oriented businesses including car sales and service, gas stations, and convenience stores.

Today the glory days exist only in memories. Destruction of housing to the west of MLK has decreased the street's viability as a neighborhood convenience center. Nearby jobs were lost when the Railroad Roundhouse complex ceased operations. In the 1960s, Union Station was demolished to construct the I-16 exit flyover, bisecting both commercial corridors. This, along with an increase in truck traffic due to that access ramp decreased pedestrian access across MLK and Montgomery Street. Montgomery Street was changed to one-way traffic to accommodate the off ramp, further diminishing the street's value as a viable business location.

Urban renewal harmed the corridor by significantly changing the scale and use of the area. The construction of the Chatham County Courthouse, Jail, and Parking Garage introduced inappropriately scaled development, and also caused two of the original town plan's squares, Liberty and Ellis squares, to be removed. In other areas, older neighborhoods were demolished to build new public housing, changing the character and density of the area.

Also, community misconceptions have harmed the corridors. It is commonly thought that the west side of MLK is outside the National Historic Landmark District. This (incorrect) perception is reinforced by the fact that modern, suburban-style infill buildings were allowed to be constructed, and the removal of the original squares as mentioned above. Also, the community has a perception of higher-than-average crime along the Corridor. Both misconceptions have decreased the community's perceived value of the area.

Economic Trends and Opportunities



A: Tourism

Tourism is Savannah's second largest industry and is the fastest growing sector of the primary economy. Downtown Savannah is a National Historic Landmark District and serves as a destination for regional, national and international visitors. In recent years, the 1996 Olympic Summer Games and the notoriety associated with the national bestselling book and film *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* have increased exposure about Savannah. Downtown's unique urban plan, landscaped squares and architecture, with a mix of residential, commercial and institutional uses is an attraction to visitors. Most of the infrastructure that supports tourism, including hotel rooms, restaurants, museums, convention and meeting facilities and a wide range of special events and entertainment are located downtown.

Conventions

Downtown Savannah is the Low Country's primary destination for regional, national and international conventions. Typical conventions in the community range from 100 to 1,500 attendees; however, the city has hosted conventions as large as 6,000 people. Until recently, the community has been unable to compete for a share of the national convention business because of its lack of large-scale convention facilities. This issue is being addressed with the construction of the Georgia International Maritime and Trade Center on Hutchinson Island. The new \$81 million dollar facility will provide a state-of-the-art venue to accommodate

groups of up to 5,000 people and will position Savannah to compete for 80% of all conventions held in the United States.

Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Downtown is the regional center of historical, cultural and entertainment attractions. Downtown is the focal point of all major art groups and associations, including the Savannah Symphony, six house museums, two performing art theater groups with stage facilities and several visual art galleries and organizations. The Civic Center hosts national known performers, touring Broadway shows, conventions, community meetings and sporting events as well as community activities such as graduation ceremonies and proms. On Broughton Street, the Lucas Theater, a former movie palace, is a performing arts facility currently undergoing major renovation. The National Historic Landmark District is also home for a wide range of community festivals and special events.

While Savannah — as seat of the thirteenth colony — greatly contributed to the nation's history, many of its citizens are notable for their contribution to local history. A number of African American leaders have emerged through Savannah's over 265 years of existence who have shaped the direction the city has taken as well as its relationship to the rest of the country. In recognition of these individuals, there are several African American landmarks in downtown Savannah. The "Savannah Negro Heritage Tour" includes The Beach Institute African American Cultural Center, the First African Baptist Church, the First Bryan Baptist Church, King-Tisdell Foundation, Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum and Savannah State College.

Because so many of the opportunities for revitalization in the

MLK/Montgomery Corridor are related to tourism, a **Tourism Master Plan** for the entire Savannah region should be developed, and would serve as a supportive tool for the revitalization of this corridor. The City of Savannah, Savannah Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Tourism Advisory Board have indicated their intention to collaborate on such a planning exercise beginning in 1998. That plan should be compatible and cross-referenced with the MLK/Montgomery Corridor Revitalization Plan and other elements of the Savannah Development and Renewal Authority's Coordinated Strategic Plan for Downtown Savannah. The Tourism Master Plan should address tourism management as well as development issues including major tourism sites and attractions that either exist or could be developed in the Corridor. Minority business development should also be a priority of the plan since tourism services will provide many new entrepreneurial opportunities.

B:

The Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD)

The expansion of this multi-disciplinary art school has had a profound radiating effect on the cultural and commercial resurgence of the City, and has renewed street life along the Corridor. The 17 graduate and undergraduate programs of the Savannah College of Art and Design prepares students for careers in the applied arts. Founded in 1978, the College has grown to include an international representation of 3,000 students, faculty and staff. The College uses the infrastructure of the city — its streets and buildings — as its campus, and

their 47 buildings are located throughout the city. All are existing structures, some are landmark buildings built by prominent architects, and others are adaptive uses of former "white elephant" buildings such as vacated schools and warehouses.

The community is invited to use college resources which include galleries, festivals and technical and professional services. Community economic gains accompanying the growth of the College includes the proliferation of new services, entertainment and demands for housing.

A campus density has emerged on MLK since 1989. Eichberg and Kiah Halls and the North and South Sheds represent part of the historic Central of Georgia Railroad Complex, and has been converted to the School of Building Arts. The facilities house departments of architecture, historic preservation, interior design, industrial design and furniture design. Other College facilities along the Boulevard include the West Bank Gallery and Garden For The Arts, Ex Libris Bookstore, Bergen Hall (photography) and Briney Hall (fashion design).

Opportunities include attracting new businesses that can cater to students, professors and College visitors, as well as creating additional nearby housing and/or studio space. Students also provide a ready source of labor for local employers.

C:

Auto-Oriented Retail

Opportunities exist to capitalize on the corridor's current auto-oriented — as opposed to pedestrian oriented — character. The

size and width of MLK, as well as its connection with the interstate makes it one of the few corridors downtown able to support auto-oriented, as opposed to pedestrian-oriented, commerce.

These opportunities vary from catering to visitors as they enter or leave the community, to capitalizing on the downtown working population who need to run errands during lunch or on their way home, to locating additional businesses that complement the existing auto sales and service entities.

Automobile Sales and Services

There are 18 auto-oriented retailers. These businesses are concentrated on Montgomery Street within a half- to one-mile radius of each other. Services range from used automobile sales to auto repair.

Fast food restaurants

There are six fast food restaurants clustered in the southern portion of the corridor revitalization plan, and a potential for more within "fast food row". There is room to add one additional fast food restaurant into "fast food row," providing an opportunity to reconfigure parking and traffic patterns to enhance the cluster.

Gas stations

There are several gas stations within the plan's coverage area.

D: Housing

The ever expanding need for housing in downtown Savannah presents an opportunity for the MLK/Montgomery Corridor. Downtown Savannah has been experiencing a high demand for housing. Development pressure has caused homes in stable neighborhoods to increase in price, and has accelerated revitalization in neighborhoods on the edge of the historic district, such as the Beach Institute area.

There is still housing along the MLK/Montgomery Corridor that could benefit from rehabilitation. Also, the Corridor has parcels of vacant land — some of the last available downtown — which present an opportunity for infill housing.

Another housing opportunity could come by following Broughton Street's success in loft living — adapting upper floors of commercial buildings to residential use. Currently, Broughton Street houses 16 market rate apartments, and is about to see an explosion of upper floor condo conversions. This shows that non-traditional, upper story living is desirable in Savannah's market, and is a viable use for these currently under used spaces.

The long term results of increasing housing availability along the corridor are many, including:

- A safer, "24 hour" area where residents can keep an eye on activities and be an enfranchised voice for positive change.

- More critical mass to patronize local businesses, particularly the clusters outlined in this plan. For example, residents would be able to buy basic groceries at the Neighborhood Convenience Center, or items to furnish their loft apartments and new or rehabilitated housing in the Home Improvement cluster.

Another housing issue that has a major impact are the three large public housing communities that border the corridor on the west and south. The Savannah Housing Authority and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development have recently completed a multimillion dollar rehabilitation of

Yamacraw Village and are in the midst of similar major rehabilitation projects at Frazier Homes and Kayton Homes. While addressing many of the deficiencies of these low-income neighborhoods, these rehabilitation projects have not changed widely-held perceptions of large-scale public housing projects as isolated, crime-ridden developments. These negative perceptions are a disincentive to new private investment adjacent to public housing. Nationwide, public housing agencies are having success replacing large-scale developments with scattered site housing and experimenting with home ownership of older projects. The SDRA should explore with the Savannah Housing Authority the long-term plans for these developments, and any plans or new initiatives should be cross-referenced with this plan. One major advantage of these communities is that the residents do provide a large consumer base for neighborhood convenience retail, particularly in the southern part of the corridor.

The Three Segments

The linear corridor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Montgomery Street contains three distinct districts, which each function differently. Each segment has unique strengths and opportunities for growth and improvement.

Neighborhood Convenience and Commercial District		
Boundaries	Existing Features and Anchors	Future Scenarios
South: Gwinnett Street North: Gaston Street	• Gaston and Berrien Ward residential • Auto-oriented convenience businesses • Fast-food cluster • Public housing: Frazier Homes and Kayton Homes • Numerous churches • Carver State Bank • West Broad YMCA	• Neighborhood service shopping center/supermarket • Housing: Infill, rehab, and lofts • Target commercial rehab in existing row of building on MLK between Gaston and Huntingdon • Small infill commercial buildings facing MLK with parking in rear • Emphasize housing for infill construction on Montgomery • Professional offices • Reconfigured "Fast Food Row" • Restored West Broad YMCA • Government or institutional office complex on large vacant sites

City Center Gateway		
Boundaries	Existing Features and Anchors	Future Scenarios
South: Gaston Street North: Oglethorpe Avenue	• Civic Center • Visitors Center • Civil Rights Museum • Battlefield Park • Savannah College of Art and Design • Major entries into Savannah	• Civil Rights Park / Monument • Eliminate the barrier of the I-16 Flyover • Home Improvement District • "Battlefield Inn" on Civic Center overflow parking lot • Expanded Entertainment / Civic Center District • CAT Transit Center • Hotel Corridor along Oglethorpe • Gateway at Oglethorpe

Downtown Crossroads

Boundaries	Existing Features and Anchors	Future Scenarios
South: Oglethorpe Avenue North: Savannah River	• Chatham County Courthouse Complex • Ships of the Sea Museum • Motels • City Market complex plus scattered restaurants • Public housing: Yamacraw Village • Gas stations / Auto service centers • Three SCAD buildings • Franklin Square • Historic churches • Savannah Electric power plant • Georgia Ports Authority wharves	• Possible site for year-round public market • Hotel upgrading and new construction • Major urban design feature at intersection of MLK and Broughton • Westward growth of City Market Dining/Entertainment • Gateway feature at West Bay and MLK • Explore reconnecting to Waterfront

Development Strategies



A:

Zones, clusters and districts

Neighborhood Convenience Commercial District

While this segment of the corridor contains the majority of the smaller scale, historic structures, it also has lost much of its historic building stock due to neglect, demolition, newer incompatible development. There are many small "missing teeth" and a handful of large vacant tracts, all of which provide opportunities for new infill structures. New buildings should conform to the design guidelines for development Downtown with zero-lot-line construction and parking in the rear to be accessed from the lanes.

The demand for housing Downtown is expanding westward from Forsyth Park. Montgomery Street can support housing rehabilitation and infill construction resulting from this growth. The upper floors of historic structures on MLK would be suitable for loft apartments. The rehabilitation of vacant row houses and apartments above storefronts could strengthen the neighborhoods of Gaston and Berrien Wards while displacing few of the stable commercial establishments.

If Downtown housing trends continue, the large vacant tracts in this segment of the corridor can accommodate a larger-scale neighborhood convenience center or supermarket. A particularly promising site is the northwest corner of Gwinnett and MLK.

The ground floors of the historic structures should be reserved for commercial use, and professional and other office uses should be encouraged. At this time, there may be too much inventory of vacant, traditionally retail storefront space to expect this section to become a vibrant retail corridor except in select nodes. Certain categories of shops may present retail revitalization opportunities, for example, a discount fashion district, if a critical mass of stores can be clustered to attract customers interested in comparison shopping.

The historic West Broad Street YMCA building is a symbolic landmark that should be rehabilitated and adaptively reused. A church-based, nonprofit, development corporation known as Con-Ed owns the building. Con-Ed is affiliated with the nearby Connor's Temple Baptist Church, and the church's leaders have envisioned the historic structure becoming a community center. Thanks to the persistence of the Con-Ed organizers, the City of Savannah has received a small federal grant to secure the structure and save it from demolition. Because the building is so deteriorated, it will be quite expensive to rehabilitate. Con-Ed and the City are exploring an economically feasible use for the structure and considering alternatives in addition to a community center.

Because the building can become an important focal point for the Neighborhood Convenience Commercial Segment of the corridor, bringing it back to life should be a high priority. The SDRS should assist both Con-Ed and the City to explore viable uses including major institutional facilities (for example, health care, government offices, or higher education), housing above storefronts, etc. One development scenario to consider is building a major institutional facility on the vacant block just to the north

of the YMCA and using the older building as an annex to the newer, much larger facility.

If a new fast-food restaurant wishes to locate on the corridor that chose not to use an existing building but instead construct a typical suburban-style model, they should be encouraged to locate on west side of MLK where there is room to squeeze one more restaurant into the existing "Fast Food Row." However, this should only be allowed with a comprehensive reconfiguration of parking and traffic patterns in the entire row, which needs to occur to reduce curb cuts and to improve safety and pedestrian access on the street.

Home Improvement Cluster

One of the most difficult challenges in urban revitalization is recreating healthy retail districts which have been decimated by economic decline. In most cases, it is better to build from remaining nodes of complementary businesses rather than attempting to introduce retail where no other viable business exist. In attempting such a strategy, it is important to also choose a location that offers many of the criteria that retailers usually need or want for a successful location. These criteria include access, visibility, traffic, parking (or very high pedestrian counts), perceptions of safety, and opportunities for comparison shopping.

One of the best opportunities for a viable retail cluster is a Home Improvement District centered around the intersection of MLK and West Jones Street. For many years, two prominent businesses have "anchored" this district — B & B

Paint Company and Thrifty Hardware. In 1997 a complementary business, Savannah Hardscapes, opened half a block off MLK on West Jones Street. Building a Home Improvement Zone around these three retailers appears to be a promising strategy. More market research would reveal other product categories that might fit in this cluster; however, likely candidates include garden supplies, kitchen and bathroom fixtures and appliances, interior design and architectural services (which could be housed above storefronts), and furniture among others.

Entertainment Zone / Civic Center

Dining and entertainment are growing sectors of Downtown's economy. Currently there are two large concentrations of these businesses: River Street and City Market. Similar businesses are spilling over around the perimeters of these large concentrations, and several smaller nodes of nightlife are emerging. One of the challenges of accommodating a growing dining and entertainment sector is the noise and traffic congestion that can sometimes accompany concentrations of night clubs, theaters, and restaurants. For example, night clubs can often be incompatible with residential uses. Also, with increasing numbers of loft apartments above storefronts, it is becoming difficult to find suitable locations for nightclubs, taverns, and restaurants. Furthermore, most nightclubs are inappropriate first floor uses in conventional retail strips. Because nightclubs are closed when the shops are open for business, ground floor nightclubs break the retail continuity and produce voids which are not conducive to the shopping experience.

The several blocks west of the Savannah Civic Center between

Montgomery, MLK, Oglethorpe, and Liberty could easily accommodate more dining and entertainment establishments.

This zone is completely isolated from residential uses and is immediately adjacent to the Civic Center, the biggest entertainment complex in the region. Dining and night spots would provide convenient support functions before and after Civic Center events. The Visitors Center is immediately across MLK and restaurant and clubs could benefit from the proximity to the tourism traffic. This area is already home to two other night spots and ideally suited for more because of the availability of late-night parking and the excellent regional access. Three SCAD dormitories are within easy walking distance as are several of the colleges academic buildings and galleries.

The daytime uses currently in this area tend to be institutional or transportation related so the nightlife could be accommodated without displacing existing businesses. Much of the land in this area is currently vacant or set aside for surface parking, and it would be possible to build new structures to accommodate the entertainment venues with daytime uses on the first floor and nightlife upstairs or in the basement.

To reconnect this area, this plan recommends the restoration of Elbert Square, which would make a handsome main entrance for the west side of the Civic Center. The restored square and the block of McDonough Street to the west of the square between MLK and Montgomery could be configured as a "Walk of the Stars" to celebrate Savannah's music legends such as King Oliver and Johnny Mercer.

A nightclub district in other segments of the MLK/Montgomery Corridor would be inappropriate, and the potential for nuisances presented by almost any nightclub would probably be unwelcome even as a stand-alone business. This area presents a special opportunity and prospective investors interested in entertainment uses Downtown should be encouraged to locate here.

Hotel/Motel Corridor

West Oglethorpe Avenue is a gateway to the city from the South Carolina communities of Bluffton, Hilton Head Island, Beaufort and Charleston via Highway 17 over the Talmadge Bridge. Consequently, this is a well traveled path for tourists and regional residents. Currently there are plans to expand US 17 to a four lane highway within the next decade. The traveler enters the city past mid-20th century motels, a bus terminal, abandoned auto dealership and a gas station, and is greeted by a vista of a County Jail and a vacant lot across MLK, Jr. Boulevard. Though there has been recent landscaping on the median strip on Oglethorpe Avenue, the strip-styled commercial development and auto-oriented scale of signs makes a poor entry in the National Historic Landmark District.

To reinstate its presence as the gateway boulevard to the historic city, build-to lines must be observed parallel to Oglethorpe Avenue. The *1997 Manual for Development in the Savannah Historic District* (commonly known as the Chadbourn Guidelines) permits five story structures on the south side of Oglethorpe Avenue and on the north side between MLK and Ann Street. No height restriction is provided for sites on the north side of Oglethorpe from West Boundary Street to Ann Street. Each corner

Visitors Center/Roundhouse/Battlefield/Museum Complex

Together, the Coastal Georgia Railroad Roundhouse Complex, Battlefield Memorial Park and Savannah-Ogeechee Canal tract make up one of Savannah's greatest and most underdeveloped historic treasures. The historic buildings, train viaducts and canal, connected by the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal to the historic wharf, illustrate the history of commerce for the region from Colonial days to the 1970s. In close proximity is the Visitors' Center and SCAD's School of Building Arts, which use other CGRR facilities, and the Coastal Heritage Society which manages the Roundhouse Complex. Together, these sites represent the largest local history district in the city.

A **Battlefield Hotel** is proposed on the southeast corner of Liberty Street and MLK, directly north of SCAD's West Bank Gallery. The design of the hotel should adhere to the build-to lines, and include parking. This corner provides a desirable location for a hotel, because the Louisville Road access to I-16 is several blocks due west of this area.

Battlefield Park should be used and interpreted as part of this larger complex. This open field is where the Siege of Savannah was fought during the Revolutionary War. The battle was distinguished as the first fought in the American Revolution with the assistance of troops from the French Army, and also included the largest unit of African American men to fight in the Revolution — a 572 regiment from Haiti.

The Savannah-Ogeechee Canal is located directly west of West Boundary Street from the Savannah River to the south of Louisville Road where the canal turns west. The Savannah-Ogeechee Canal

of the intersection of Oglethorpe Avenue and MLK should be redeveloped with landmark buildings which re-establish the street edge and anchor the corners of this important gateway to the historic district.

The Chadbourn guidelines suggest that a hotel, as opposed to a motel, development would be preferred along MLK. Along Oglethorpe Avenue parking areas should be located in the rear of the property, with the exception of drop-off and registration parking at the building entry. Chadbourn recommends, "Such drop off shall occur in a recessed area of the building such that the upper floors and the balance of the frontage about the build-to line."

The current standards of auto-oriented development is not compatible with the urban character of Savannah's historic district. Design specifications for signs must be regulated for this area, with lower profiles than the current, large auto-oriented signs. For all existing buildings that do not meet the build-to guidelines for Oglethorpe Avenue, landscaping should be used to re-establish the build-to line. Adequate sidewalks must be provided between the MLK and West Boundary Street. For future development of strip-style, auto-related services such as gas stations and motels, sites should be investigated near the I-16 access ramps, which include West Boundary Street near Gwinnett and Louisville Roads. Based on the recommendations of this plan, some growth will most likely migrate to this area, so there should also be a development plan in place to allow attractive and compatible growth to occur. Without a plan, we are simply relocating unattractive strip-style, auto-oriented development to a different location.

Society plans to restore this section of the canal and add a museum, which could be located in the old train building nested in the west bend of the canal. The Savannah-Ogeechee Canal Society proposes rides along the canal, as well as a bicycle path that could provide a history of Savannah and Georgia's commerce by canal, trains and port trail. Parking for visitors would also be included in their plan.

SCAD owns the land and the train sheds behind Eichberg and Kiah Halls and has designed a dormitory/sports facility to extend the sheds west to the train viaduct on their property.

Market District

A study, co-sponsored by city and county governments, identified five sites for a public market which were compatible with the parameters for viable market locations. In an effort to support corridor redevelopment, four of these sites are located adjacent to MLK. The fifth site is the location of Savannah's historic market building on Ellis Square. The consultant recommended Ellis Square, which offered the most affordable solution for Phase I of the consultant's proposal—an on-street farmers market. Phase II describes a 26 vendor specialty food market, requiring air-conditioned facilities and additional parking.

The Phase I farmers and craft market began operation on W. St. Julian Street in the spring of 1998, and plans are moving forward to implement the next phases of the plan.

The four Corridor related sites are:

- 1) MLK west of Broughton Street and north of the Ships of the Sea Museum;
- 2) The southeast corner of MLK and Oglethorpe Avenue — Chatham Area Transit's preferred site for the CAT Transit Center;
- 3) Franklin Square; and
- 4) The southwest corner of MLK and Oglethorpe Avenue — Dearing Chevrolet property.

Each of the sites has various advantages and drawbacks. See the *Savannah Public Market Task Force Site Evaluation and Recommendation*, July 16, 1997, Urban Market Development for further details.

Waterfront

The primary wharf district for the Port of Savannah was located between West Broad Street and the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal during the 19th century and early 20th century. The Port was relocated further west in the 1940's, due to construction of the new Talmadge Bridge. Light industrial buildings and worker's houses were located between the wharfs and Bay Street. West Broad Street extended to the Savannah River; this public right-of-way is still denoted on city maps. Negro baptisms were conducted in the Savannah River at the terminus of West Broad Street.

Today, the Savannah Electric and Power Company (SEPCO) plant blocks access to the river at the terminus of MLK with gated parking and overhead conduit breaching the public right-of-way. The SEPCO facility is the western terminus of the

riverfront walk; historic warehouses reside in the shadow of later additions to this brick facility. Chadbourn's Edge District recommendations suggest that redevelopment of the waterfront district west of MLK is dependant on the conversion of the brick SEPCO structure to a tourist related use. He provided a scenario for a part of river inlet to open up sites adjacent to it. However, SCAD has obtained three buildings fronting River Street — an indicator for impending redevelopment of this district.

The terminus of MLK at the Savannah River is a natural draw for tourists. This node also provides an important link to the River Street warehouse district. This plan recommends *exploring* reopening the area as a public right-of-way to the river and developing a plaza with commemoration plaques for the historic wharf district and the location for Negro baptisms. Due to its complexity and scale, the region between MLK and the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal and Bay and River Streets warrant a separate redevelopment study.

B:

Historic Preservation

Historic preservation has proven to be a sound economic development strategy for Savannah. Preserving historic character and fabric makes a city livable for its citizens, and provides visitors a pleasant place to experience and enjoy.

While MLK has significant historic resources, development in recent years has destroyed much of the visible clues to this rich heritage, especially in the southern half of the corridor.

MLK had been home to many of the city's African American businesses, social and cultural institutions. Much of the physical remnants of this legacy has been lost.

Recent zoning improvements in the Corridor support rehabilitation of historic structures and reinforce Savannah's town plan, as do the recently adopted design guidelines, known as the Chadbourn guidelines.

The Savannah Development and Renewal Authority's Facade Improvement Program (FIP) has sparked active renovation of historic facades on Broughton Street. Funds have been allocated to loan to property or business owners on MLK, and interest in the program has been strong. The rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings is appropriate in blighted areas of Savannah. It is usually easier — and more affordable — to renovate an existing building than to start anew. Historic preservation needs to be actively promoted along the corridor.

As each building is renovated, a visible clue is revealed and another piece of the historic fabric is restored. As missing pieces of the historic town plan are replaced, the sense of the Corridor's belonging to the National Historic Landmark District is strengthened.

C:

Public Facilities and Amenities

Squares, Parks, and Gateways

- Restore Liberty Square and Elbert Square as part of an I-16

flyover removal and Montgomery Street restoration project.

- Develop major gateway projects at Gwinnett Street, Gaston Street (Civil Rights Park), Louisville Road, Oglethorpe Avenue, and Bay Street
- Create a Civil Rights Park and Monument on MLK next to the Gaston Street exit for I-16 and across the street from the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum. Room for this will be made available when the I-16 flyover is eliminated.
- Explore a potential waterfront access point at the foot of MLK.

Parking Facilities

Public parking lots in the Downtown Home Improvement Center and on the east side of MLK near Gwinnett. Site these lots behind the historic structures or the new infill buildings.

D:

Corridor Urban Redevelopment Plan

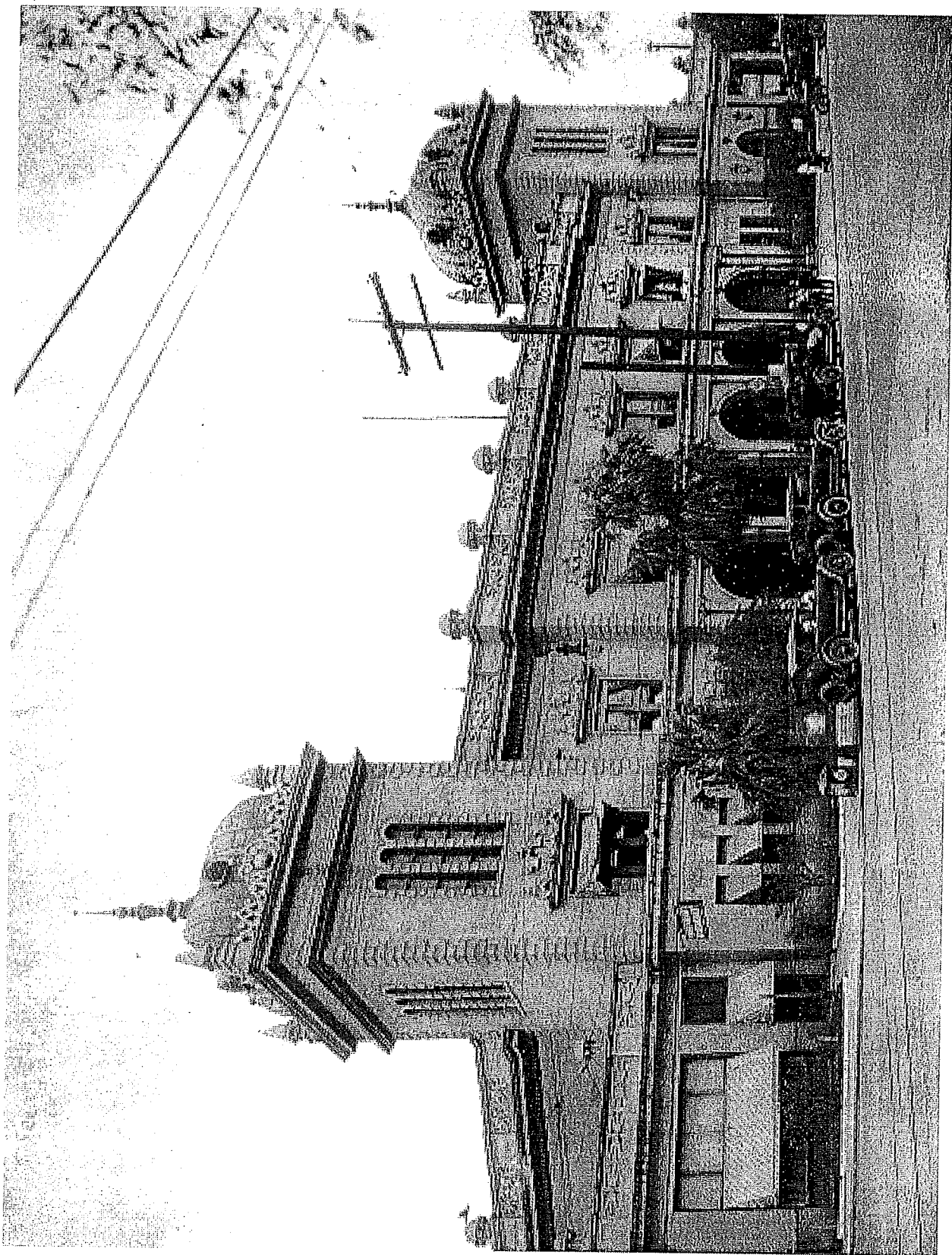
One issue that was frequently raised by stakeholders in the corridor is the concern about absentee landlords who are not interested in redeveloping their property and speculators who have unrealistic expectations of the value of their properties. It can be difficult for a community to move forward with a

revitalization plan unless the local government has the ability to assemble land for larger redevelopment projects or persuade owners of smaller, vacant buildings to move forward with the revitalization goals the community has adopted.

In these cases, Title 36, Chapter 61, the Urban Redevelopment Law of the Code of Georgia, allows cities to adopt and enforce revitalization plans by creating urban renewal areas. In Savannah, this tool was used to create a Broughton Street Urban Renewal District and plan in 1986. One of the benefits of an urban renewal designation is the power it gives the City of Savannah to acquire property through eminent domain not only for public uses like streets and parks but also to eliminate blight. If a property owner is not prepared to rehabilitate a neglected building or redevelop the property according to the City's plan, the City can use eminent domain and purchase the property for fair market value. In this way, the City can acquire property for economic development purposes, for example, a city-sponsored commercial redevelopment project.

Without a formal Urban Redevelopment Plan in place, the community will be at a disadvantage in implementing local economic development goals. One of the first orders of business once the MLK/Montgomery Revitalization Plan is approved should be to adopt a local ordinance creating the Urban Renewal Area designation.

Transportation Strategies



A:

Gateway Function

Visitors Center / I-16 Freeway / Highway 17 / Talmadge Bridge

The I-16 Freeway is the primary access between Savannah and Atlanta and to I-95. Oglethorpe Avenue is the entry from Hilton Head, Beaufort, Bluffton and Charleston, South Carolina via U.S. Highway 17, a two-way country road. Within the next decade, Highway 17 will be widened to a four-lane road. Highway 17 offers a shorter travel distance from southbound I-95 to Savannah than I-16, so is subject to heavy industrial truck traffic between I-95 and industry east of the historic district. MLK and Bay Street are the primary crosstown thoroughfares for the majority of this industrial traffic.

The Visitors Center welcomes and orients tourists and should be highly visible and easy to locate. Currently, both Montgomery Street and the Talmadge Bridge (via Oglethorpe Avenue) deliver visitors north of the Visitors Center. Existing entries to the city from I-16 at Gwinnett Street, Gaston Street, and Louisville Road provide a more direct route to the Visitors Center.

Currently, all entrances into the city are unattractive. From I-16 you see vacant land and public housing (Gwinnett Street), an urban wasteland (Louisville Road) or dilapidated buildings, vacant land and gas stations (Gaston Street, Montgomery Street). From Bay Street, once you cross the viaduct, you are greeted with modern, deeply set-back strip-style buildings. From the Talmadge Bridge, a visitor sees rundown hotels, the

jail and vacant land. None of these entrances are particularly welcoming or appealing, and provide visitors with a very poor first impression.

There are opportunities along MLK to provide ceremonial gateways at various locations. A gateway is defined as a place where one experiences a sense of arrival.

At Bay Street, streetscaping and a change in pavement or crosswalk materials could signal an arrival, as well as slow traffic upon entering the historic district. This provides an opportunity to introduce a city-wide directional sign program.

Recapturing the zero-lot line with new construction or landscaping along Oglethorpe Avenue would create a tunnel effect from the bridge, culminating in MLK with a monument to Tomochichi. A system of city-wide directional signs could also be introduced at this location.

Where I-16 exits onto Gaston Street, restored commercial buildings surrounding the Civil Rights museum could immediately show visitors the importance of African American contributions to the community.

B:

Regional Mobility (East-West Access Study)

MLK and Montgomery Street are major thoroughfares for vehicular and industrial truck traffic for access to I-16 and US 17. The most heavily traveled are the intersections MLK at Bay Street and MLK at Oglethorpe Avenue. Industrial truck traffic

from east of the historic district travels along Bay Street to the Viaduct, or along MLK to access the Talmadge Bridge and the I-16 on-ramp. Residents and tourists use east/west streets Bay, Oglethorpe and Liberty to cross the city, and the above routes out of the city.

MLK is an unfriendly pedestrian environment, and is generally perceived as a significant boundary between activities on the west side of the Corridor and the rest of the historic district.

While it is important to be sensitive to the mobility needs of Savannah area businesses and industry, the revitalization of this corridor relies on increasing pedestrian access *to* and pedestrian traffic *by* the businesses. Thoughtful planning must occur to address the needs of businesses along the corridor who must have easily accessible customer parking and pedestrian traffic to thrive.

C: Historic Street Grid

The historic organization pattern of the city extended east/west streets of the wards to West Broad Street between Liberty and Bay Streets. From Liberty to Gaston Streets, the east-west streets were either offset or aligned extensions of titling blocks or trust lot blocks, some with east-west lanes at mid-block. From Gaston to Gwinnett Street, the east-west streets and lanes between Montgomery and West Broad were direct extensions of the Victorian residential blocks. This street pattern created long, narrow lots with frontages on both West Broad and Montgomery Streets and delineated the scale of

buildings unique to Savannah. These east/west streets and lanes also sustained pedestrian and vehicular access between West Broad and the residential wards.

The construction of the County Courthouse complex, the Civic Center and the I-16 off-ramp to Montgomery Street eliminated almost half of the east/west streets between Bay and Gwinnett Streets. The resultant super-scaled blocks effectively shrank the west edge of Oglethorpe's Plan eastward to Montgomery and Barnard Streets adjacent to these developments. Other east/west street and lane closures appear to be occurring by ignoring these public rights-of ways. The net impact of these street closings was to isolate MLK from the eastern residential communities, creating the perception that MLK was the downtown commercial strip for fast food chains and gas stations.

Great care should be taken to reconstruct the east/west streets and lanes destroyed by the I-16 off-ramp to Montgomery Street and along the length of MLK for all new construction. The new school currently give the appearance of a slum, and would need development to enhance this gateway to the city.

Gwinnett Street is a generous four-lane, divided street between MLK and I-16. This stretch of Gwinnett Street is flanked by recent public housing, which is recessed from the street. This area could be enhanced with good street lighting and abundant street landscaping. The advantage of this approach to the historic district would be the marketing and visibility advantages with increased street traffic on MLK from Gwinnett Street to the river.

D:

I-16 Flyover and Montgomery Street

Removing the I-16 flyover to Montgomery Street would repair the erosion of the west edge of the historic district in many ways. The removal would permit two-way traffic on Montgomery Street and allow the restoration of Elbert and Liberty Squares. Land between Montgomery and MLK could be reclaimed for development, which would reconnect this isolated section of the city. Former street and lane connections between the residential neighborhoods of the historic district and the Corridor could be reestablished to provide easier access to the Corridor. Furthermore, removal of the I-16 on-ramp at MLK would encourage industrial truck traffic to find alternate ways through the city and reconnect the residential fabric of the neighborhoods located between the Corridor and I-16. These repairs to the west edge of the historic district are critical for development, as the erosion has perceptually and physically disconnected the Corridor from the city, and thereby encouraged the strip character development of recent years.

Historically, West Broad Street did not constitute the west boundary of the city. Nineteenth-century Savannah extended to West Boundary Street and the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal, with an urban density of workers' housing on small blocks located between Gwinnett and River Streets. These residential neighborhoods supported the commerce of the corridor.

On and off ramps for Interstate 16 occur in pairs at three locations:

- 1) M.L. King Boulevard at Gaston and Taylor Streets;
- 2) Louisville Road west of West Boundary Street, and;
- 3) Gwinnett Street at West Boundary Street.

Therefore, the removal of the I-16 off-ramp at Montgomery Street should require demolition work only, and no new construction for the entry/exits. The Gwinnett and Louisville Road access points, along with the exit onto Oglethorpe Avenue, provide three access points within nine city blocks. In essence, the off-ramp to Montgomery Street is redundant.

Louisville Road is a two-way, two lane road with an approach to the historic district between the Visitors' Center and the Roundhouse complex, adjacent to the Revolutionary War Battlefield Park. The easiest way into the Visitors' Center is from the back via West Boundary to Hull Street. The Louisville Road approach to I-16 is unmarked at MLK, so may be unknown to Savannah residents and tourists. This three block approach is somewhat rural in character, passing over and parallel to the historic Savannah Ogeechee Canal, and street lighting is necessary between these ramps and MLK. Gas stations and other auto/tourist related services on Louisville Road near the access ramps could increase the sense of safety at this location. The proposed site for Battlefield Park is highly visible along Louisville Road. Its unkempt appearance and the empty residential lots between Louisville Road and the new school currently give the appearance of a slum, and would need development to enhance this gateway to the city.

Gwinnett Street is a generous four-lane, divided street

between MLK and I-16. This stretch of Gwinnett Street is flanked by recent public housing, which is recessed from the street. This area could be enhanced with good street lighting and abundant street landscaping. The advantage of this approach to the historic district would be the marketing and visibility advantages with increased street traffic on MLK from Gwinnett Street to the river.

E:

Traffic Calming Measures and Pedestrian Plan

A ten-foot wide, lightly landscaped median with vehicular street crossings and clearly demarcated pedestrian crosswalks at all intersections should be constructed to slow traffic and provide a pedestrian refuge. Also, reducing or eliminating industrial truck traffic from historic district streets would significantly calm traffic. To accomplish this, the I-16 on-ramp at MLK should be eliminated. Outbound industrial truck traffic should be redirected to Liberty Street for the Louisville Road entry/exit, and to Gwinnett for West Boundary Street to I-16.

F:

Alternative Truck Routes

The proposal for redevelopment of MLK as a pedestrian friendly street necessitates finding alternative routes for industrial truck traffic. This area of investigation needs further study by Chatham Urban Transportation Study (CUTS) staff, and this plan recommends the following alternative solutions.

1.a: All truck traffic for industry west of the historic district should be required to use either I-516 at US 80/26, or I-16 via Louisville Road access point.

1 b: West Boundary Street, located west of MLK, once connected the Savannah River and Gwinnett Street next to the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal and defined the western boundary of the historic district. It appears to have supported both residential and industrial vehicular traffic. West Boundary Street was used as the approach to the old Talmadge Bridge from Savannah. Several public projects have eroded the continuous path of this perimeter street.

The recently rebuilt Bay Street Viaduct turned West Boundary Street into a one-way street north from Bay Street to River Street, and has no southbound entry. Between Oglethorpe Avenue and Bay Street, West Boundary is a dirt road with no visible access point. It is flanked by the construction site for a new pumping station, located on the S-O Canal with the Canal rerouted around the station, and Yamacraw Village public housing, with all street entries to West Boundary Street blocked. This section may have been closed as early as 1941 with the construction of Yamacraw Village.

West Boundary is accessed by a left turn from the entry of the new Talmadge Bridge on Oglethorpe Avenue, and continues south to Gwinnett Street as a two-way street. There are two access points to I-16 along West Boundary; one is located several blocks west of Louisville Road and the other is at Gwinnett Street. As it intersects Louisville Road, West Boundary is a scenic road with historic masonry train bridges over the S-O Canal, but cannot accommodate heavy or industrial traffic. The section of West

Boundary between Oglethorpe and Gwinnett should be designed as scenic/historic auto route connection.

CUTS should explore a road connection between the Port Authority and I-16 at Louisville Road for industrial traffic, which may be accommodated by either reconnecting West Boundary Street from River Street to Gwinnett or by creating a parallel service road west of the Canal between River Street and Louisville Road. Further erosion of West Boundary Street for public works projects should not be permitted. West Boundary has value both for utilitarian and historic merit.

2. a: All truck traffic for the industry east of the historic district be required to take Truman Parkway to DeRenne to I-516.

b: All truck traffic for the industry east of the historic district be rerouted across Hutchinson Island by an extension of the Truman Parkway to UW-17 in South Carolina to I-95.

3. No heavy truck traffic, for east or west industrial areas should access city streets of the historic district between 6:00 am and 11:00 pm, a policy that other cities have used to regulate through-town truck traffic.

G:

CAT Transit Center and Other Transit Issues

Chatham Area Transit's (CAT) preferred site for a new Transit Center is the site bounded by MLK and Montgomery Street,

and Oglethorpe Avenue and West Hull Street. This is a prominent site with high visibility as the Oglethorpe gateway to the historic district. This is also one of the most heavily traveled intersections in the Central Business District. Any development of this site would benefit from the proposal to convert Montgomery Street to a two-way street as part of eliminating the I-16 off ramp at Montgomery. The development for this site should respond to the Recommendations for Edge Districts in the 1997 *Manual for Development in the Savannah Historic District* and Historic District Zoning Ordinance. Recommendations for this site suggest that a five-story building be constructed which fronts onto Montgomery Street, Oglethorpe Avenue and MLK, with build-to lines established on those streets.

This site as a CAT transfer station needs a thorough alternatives analysis study that involves the entire community, for several reasons. The impact of increased vehicular traffic for a CAT transfer station and parking garage would add to already existing congestion. A bus station and parking garage at this location may also have detrimental visual and economic impact on the Corridor redevelopment. The development of this site requires careful consideration to ameliorate the already-mentioned problems of scale and permeability near the Civic Center and the County Court complex. This site can accommodate a pedestrian friendly development that would compliment the County Courthouse and Civic Center, such as a hotel or office building.

Other sites should be explored. One possible site is the southwest corner of Oglethorpe Avenue and MLK, between Oglethorpe and Fahm Streets. "The site at the southwest corner of Oglethorpe and MLK is on axis with Oglethorpe and should house a significant building. These blocks are deep and parking garages here could

also serve the parking needs of the Civic Center District where the construction of parking garages would be more disruptive.”¹ Greyhound facilities could more readily be accommodated in an intermodal facility as this location, accessed via Papy or Fahm Streets. A park-and-ride garage located between Papy and Fahm Streets could be accessed from I-16 via Louisville Road exit and West Boundary Street, or directly from the Talmadge Bridge. The scale of this site could also accommodate tourist trams and shuttle service to both the Savannah International Air Terminal and the Amtrak Station. The site was one of five sites studied for the Public Market initiative, but may have potential for this more intense development.

Another possible site location for the CAT Transfer Station is the northeast corner of Oglethorpe Avenue and MLK at the county jail facility, which is currently underutilized.

H:

Parking Supply and Management

MLK Commercial Redevelopment

With new buildings fronting on both Montgomery and MLK, the Corridor redevelopment plan should maintain on-street parallel parking and additional parking off the east/west lanes between these two streets. Wherever possible, additional parking should be developed behind buildings.

Civic Center Parking

Parking for this historic district is problematic, but the west side of the historic district has several opportunities for efficient parking structures. The site bounded by Liberty and Harris Streets, and by Montgomery and Jefferson Streets, due south of the Civic Center, could support a five-story parking garage to service the Civic Center. Such structure could free up the southeast portion of Orleans Square for redevelopment as a residential neighborhood and allow Jefferson Street to be reopened between Oglethorpe and Liberty. The Champion-McAlpin-Fowlker House on Orleans Square is the most direct link with Savannah's Renaissance of the early 19th century, yet is neglected by historic tours. Such parking structure should be required to provide street level office or retail space at which are pedestrian friendly, as seen in the City of Savannah's State Street garage, at the corner of Drayton and State Streets.

A Park and Ride Garage

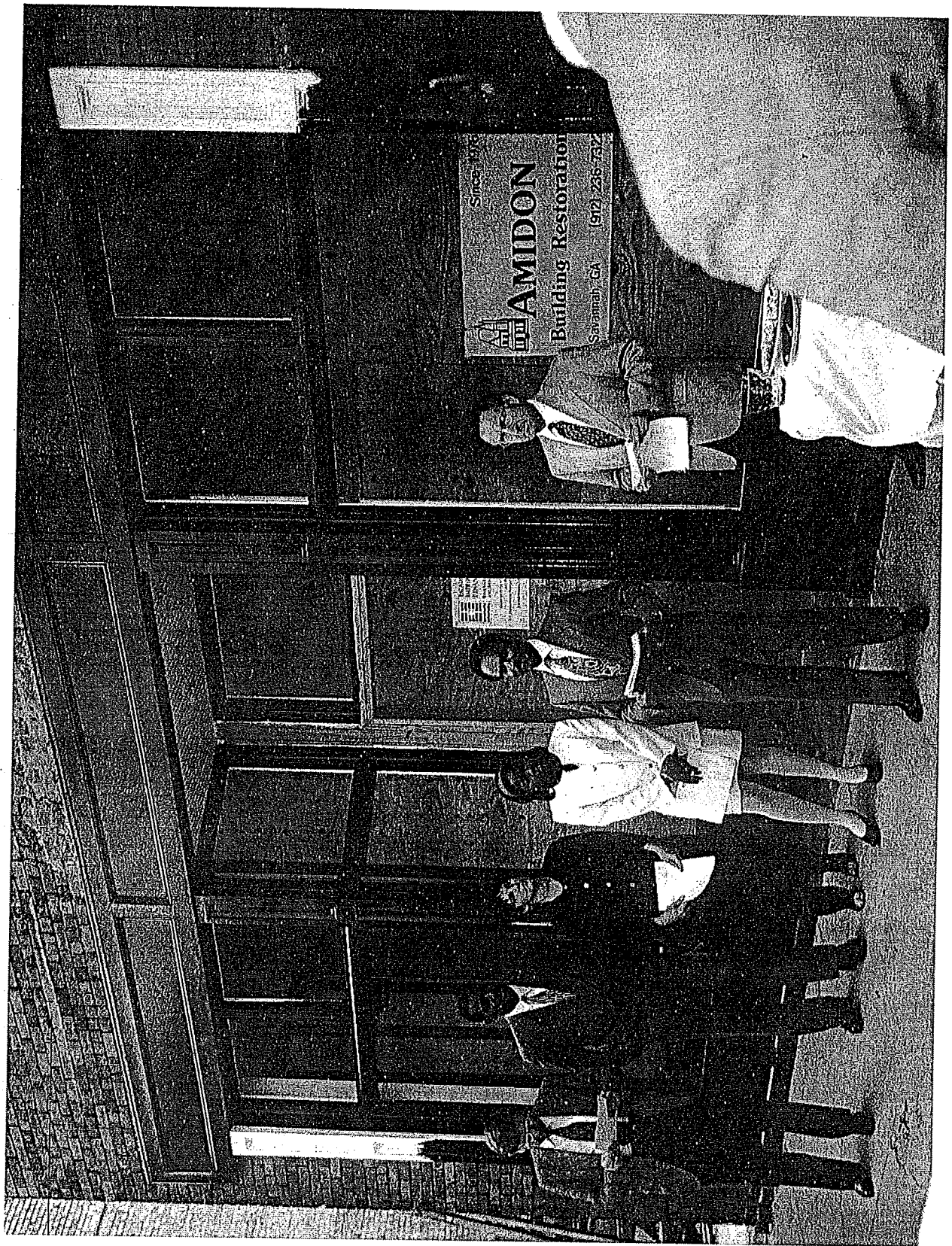
A park and ride garage is proposed in conjunction with the CAT Transfer Station.

Railroad Roundhouse Complex Parking

This plan recommends that the City acquire the land between Harris and Charlton Streets and the Roundhouse complex and MLK to develop landscaped, on-grade parking.

¹1997 Manual for Development in the Savannah Historic District, page 35

Management Strategies



A:

Retail Retention And Recruitment

As mentioned earlier in this report, it is difficult to recreate healthy retail districts which have been decimated by economic decline. It is better to build from remaining nodes of complementary businesses than attempt to introduce retail where viable businesses no longer exist. Retailers usually require access, visibility, traffic, parking (or very high pedestrian counts), a feeling of safety, and neighboring businesses for customers to comparison shop.

A comprehensive retention and recruitment effort should be launched in the corridor. Existing business people should be contacted, and their future plans to either expand or retire their businesses should be noted. Based on the feedback, educational or financial programs should be developed to address any needs that arise.

To effectively recruit new retail businesses, a retail market study should be commissioned for the entire downtown. Recruitment becomes easier when data can prove that markets actually exist for various retail businesses, and existing business people should be used. Those who are doing well are the best recruiters for new businesses.

A market study would allow specific businesses to be targeted, increasing their chance of success along the corridor. Also, the study may point out previously unenvisioned business opportunities.

Significant emphasis should also be given to attracting office uses to the corridor. These offices bring traffic, as well as provide a captive market for neighboring retail businesses.

B:

Business Lending

A variety of funds currently exist, some to rehabilitate space for businesses to occupy, some to provide assistance to businesses. The SDRRA will promote the array of programs to new and existing businesses, as well as develop or request more as needs surface.

Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard Facade Improvement Program

This program offers low-cost loans to stimulate economic activity and to strengthen the historic character of Downtown Savannah. Any commercial property owner or business tenant is eligible to apply for loan funds if the building faces MLK between River Street and Gwinnett Street.

Funds are loaned on a first-approved, first-funded basis at a fixed interest rate. Loan limits are based on the foot frontage of a building, currently the maximum loan to any single project is \$30,000. This program is administered by the Savannah Development and Renewal Authority.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Revolving Loan Fund

This program provides low cost financing for new or existing businesses in Savannah. The program provides low interest funds for property acquisitions, interior or exterior renovations,

acquisitions of machinery or equipment, working capital and inventory. The maximum loan amount is \$150,000 and terms range from three to ten years. The program is administered by the City of Savannah for small business development.

Small Business Assistance Corporation

The SBAC provides services and financing for small business development in Chatham, Bryan, Bulloch, Effingham and Liberty Counties. The SBAC loan programs include the SBA 7(A), 504 and 7(M) Micro-loan Program, the City of Savannah Loan Guarantee Program, the Direct Revolving Loan Fund (City of Savannah), Minority Retailers Loan Program and the Savannah Regional Small Business Capital Fund. The SBAC business services include specialized management and technical assistance, business planning, business acquisition assistance and business education and training.

Coastal Area District Development Authority

In June 1976, the U.S. Department of Commerce, through its Economic Development Administration (EDA) provided a \$5 million grant which resulted in the establishment of the Authority (CADD). The grant was used to make a loan to retain 850 jobs in Coastal Georgia. The loan repayments created a Revolving Loan Fund to provide economic assistance to other businesses within an eight-county region of Coastal Georgia, including Bryan, Camden, Chatham, Effingham, Glynn, Liberty, Long and McIntosh Counties.

C:

Public Safety

One of the persistent negative images of the corridor is that it is not safe. Real and perceived crime problems must be addressed in order to encourage new investment. Several obvious short-range strategies should be pursued including the following:

- 1) The City's **Community Oriented Policing** strategy is proving to be effective in many neighborhoods. The Savannah Police Department should be consulted about similar efforts in this corridor, particularly in the Neighborhood Convenience Commercial segment. Crime watch and similar initiatives would be useful in creating a sense of identity for the neighborhood as well as organizing the residents and business people.
- 2) The City of Savannah should consider locating a **police substation** in a very visible location in the Neighborhood Convenience Commercial segment of the corridor, preferably on MLK between Gwinnett Street and the I-16 flyover.
- 3) The City should **improve street lighting** to respond to the frequent citizen comments about the area being dark and appearing unsafe at night. An inventory of existing conditions will reveal that these concerns are valid in some locations even though lighting levels are appropriate in other locations. A detailed lighting plan is needed with a focus on commercial nodes that attract customers in the evenings. The lighting improvements

should be pedestrian-oriented, as opposed to highway-oriented, and coordinate with streetscape and traffic calming measures discussed in other sections of this plan.

- 4) Even as the crime statistics improve in distressed Downtown corridors, the perception of danger is likely to persist. One approach that has proven successful in more than 2,000 American cities is a **supplemental security patrol or ambassadors program privately funded by a business improvement district (BID)**. If the business community throughout Downtown Savannah decides to adopt this approach, the primary commercial nodes along the corridor would be good candidates for locations to deploy the patrols. Of course, the business and property owners along the corridor would need to participate in the special assessments in order to fund supplemental patrols.

D:

Public Space Maintenance and Management

Sidewalks along MLK and Montgomery Street are in poor condition, dirty and are generally uninviting to the pedestrian. Highway-scale lights and lack of any landscape barrier between sidewalk and street adds to the unfriendly pedestrian environment.

A clean, well-maintained area feels safer and can make it easier to attract new investment. The public sector must take the lead on these issues, as they are best equipped to address them.

The City should either adopt or rigorously enforce litter abatement laws on vacant lots. In conjunction with the business community, the City's Park and Tree and Sanitation departments should coordinate major corridor clean-ups, semiannually at a minimum. This should include pressure-washing the sidewalks.

Sidewalks should be evaluated, and a prioritized plan developed for sidewalk replacement. Highway-scale lights should be replaced with shorter, pedestrian scaled light fixtures which can actually increase the foot candles on the corridor by reflecting light off buildings. Attractive trash receptacles should be placed frequently along the corridor, and emptied frequently. Appropriate street trees should be installed, with proper irrigation, to provide shade and a barrier between pedestrian and traffic.

Marketing Strategies



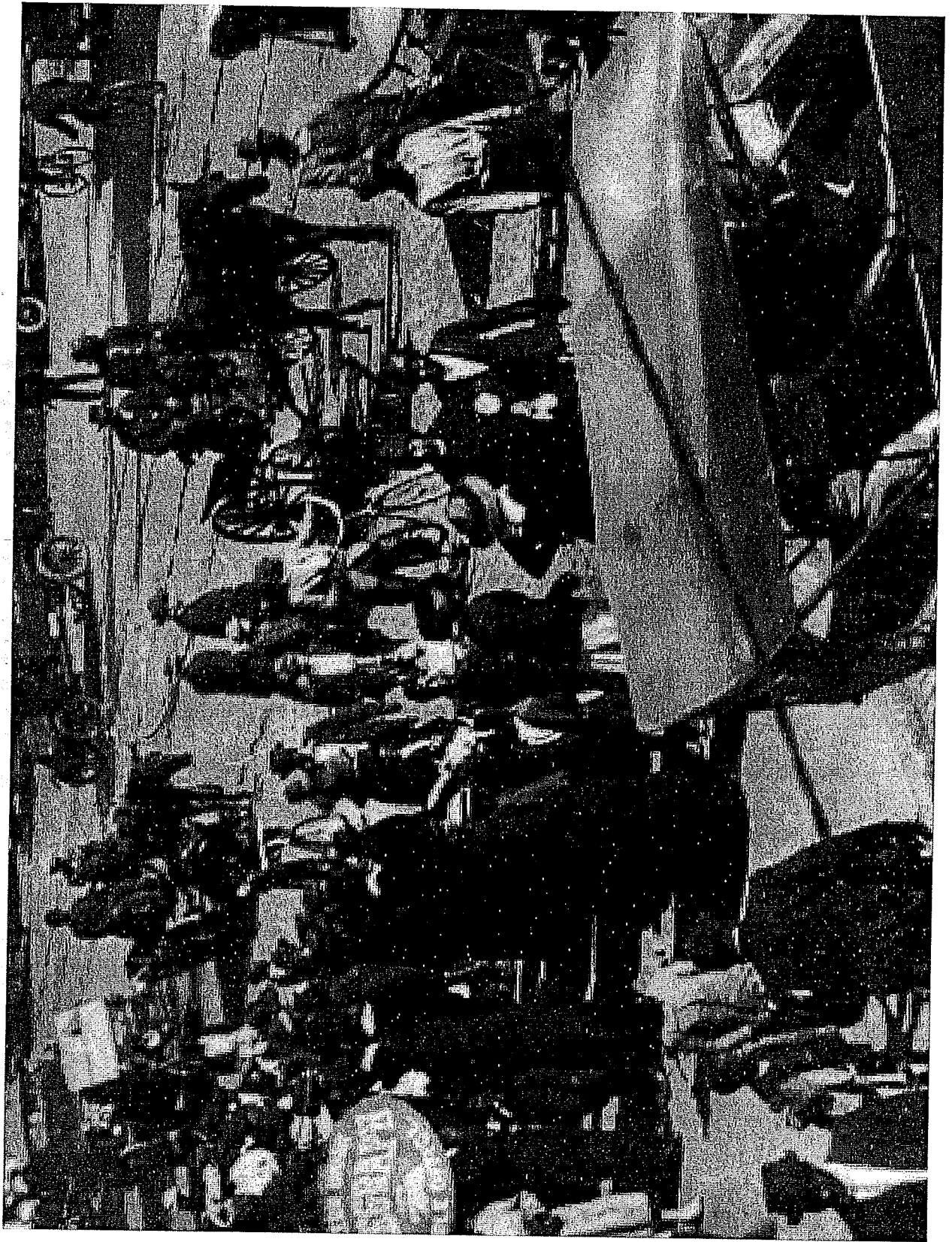
The SDRA should devise and implement a marketing and promotion strategy which will reinforce the development and management strategies outlined above. Marketing and promotion is needed to create a sense of identity for the corridor and its various segments, build public support for the revitalization initiative, and attract private investors.

Promotions are an essential part of a comprehensive economic development strategy, necessary in changing peoples perceptions about downtown as a place to shop or invest. A marketing and

promotional plan should be underpinned by a solid market analysis, which assess surrounding customer characteristics and their needs and buying power.

While outside the scope of this plan, a marketing program should draw on the fine examples that have been employed in successful Downtown revitalization efforts in Savannah as well as around the nation. Media relations, public relations, special events, retail promotions, street banners/signs, newsletters and similar publications should all be addressed by the SDRA's work program.

Organizational Structure & Partnerships



The success of any revitalization plan is usually determined by how well the stakeholders work as partners.

Lead Agency:

The Savannah Development and Renewal Authority shall lead and coordinate the implementation of this plan. The SDRA's enabling legislation and experience in Downtown revitalization enable them to be the "keeper of the vision" and to advise, encourage, and assist other partners in carrying out the goals of the plan. Several of the development, management, and marketing strategies will be carried out directly by the Authority. Furthermore, this corridor plan is a component of the SDRA's Coordinated Strategic Plan for Downtown Savannah. Due to its unique entrepreneurial nature, the Authority is best positioned to manage the plan as well as respond to changing conditions throughout the Downtown area.

Primary Public Sector Partners:

Local government is a major player and both the City of Savannah and Chatham County can have a major influence based on their capital improvements decisions and delivery of public services.

The City of Savannah

The City plays an integral part in the revitalization of the corridor. Along with streets, sidewalks, parks and building restoration, the City has a vested interest in the growth of this once thriving business district. A vital commercial district generates increased revenues through property and sales tax and serves as a symbol of the City's health.

Chatham County

Chatham County is a stakeholder on the corridor, as well as a major property owner. A vital commercial district generating increased revenues through property and sales tax also effects the County's bottom line. Also, due to the County's dual role as Chatham Area Transit board, plans for the CAT Transit Center play a large role in the future development of the corridor.

Other Governmental Partners:

Other government agencies are already heavily invested in the corridor or can assist with the success of this plan through their service planning or facilities location decisions.

Metropolitan Planning Commission
Housing Authority of Savannah
Georgia Ports Authority

Federal Agencies: U.S. Postal Service, General Services Administration

Economic Development Partners:

Other entities can leverage economic development in the corridor, whether through business development and recruitment, tourism marketing, advocacy for appropriate public services, or cooperative self-help through business associations.

Savannah Economic Development Authority
Greater Savannah Chamber of Commerce
Savannah Convention and Visitors Bureau
Downtown Business Association

Educational Institution Partners:

Because of the major presence of educational facilities along MLK, SCAD, the Coastal Center for Continuing Education, and the local public schools will continue to play active roles in shaping the future of the corridor.

Savannah College of Art and Design
Savannah State University and Armstrong Atlantic
State University
Savannah/Chatham County Board of Education

Private Advocacy Organization Partners:

Representatives from several private advocacy groups have provided significant input to this plan and have indicated a willingness to assist in making sure it is carried out appropriately. Examples include:

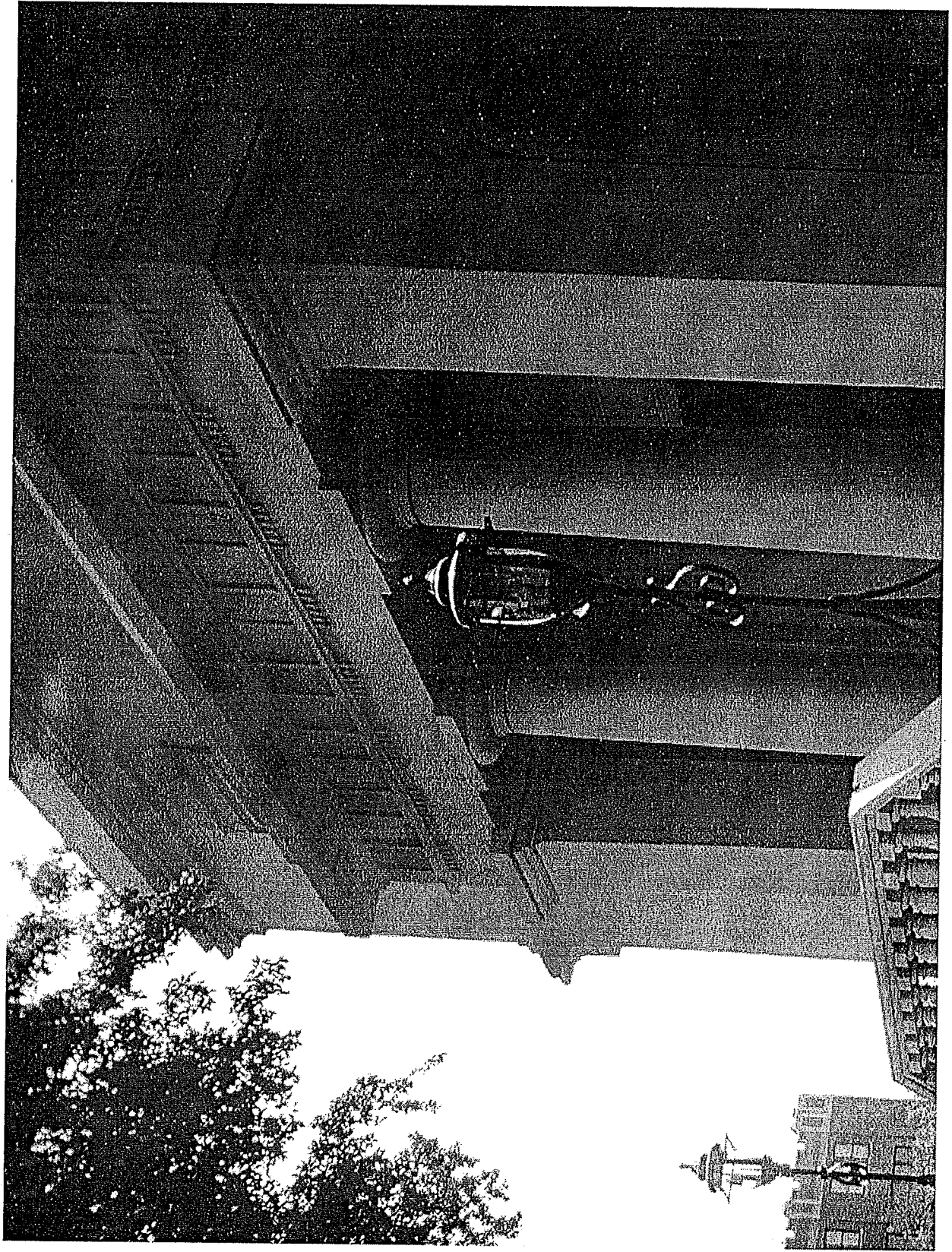
Historic Savannah Foundation
Downtown Neighborhood Association

Cultural Organization Partners:

Several religious and cultural organizations have major stakes in the success of this plan. Museums, visitor attractions, and churches are already substantial property owners and form the stable nucleus around which investor confidence can grow. Many of these institutions have the potential to become development partners as well.

Coastal Heritage Society
Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum
Religious congregations in the corridor

Conclusions



The revitalization of the Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard/Montgomery Street Corridor will not happen overnight. While addressing short-term goals, the long-term plan must be flexible and responsive to changing markets and community desires. Public and private investment in the corridor will be critical to its successful revitalization.

Initial public sector investment in enhancing public spaces

and services will cause immediate change, and spark revitalization. Their investment will also serve to decrease the private-sector's sense of risk, instigating new business growth and development.

Through a comprehensive effort, including management, public and private urban design, promotions and marketing and targeted business development, the corridor can prosper again.

Action Steps

From City:

Adopt plan

Public Infrastructure

Install landscaped median

Help with initial clean up, install and maintain attractive trash receptacles

Support and help plan community-wide directional sign plan

Support, plan, implement and fund gateway improvements

Safety

Locate Police substation on corridor

Develop Community Oriented Policing program on corridor

Economic Development

Support and fund downtown Market Study

Support and fund Tourism Master Plan, with special emphasis on corridor

From County:

Adopt plan

Appoint member to SDRRA's MLK/Montgomery Corridor committee

Improve MLK facade of Courthouse, through clean up, shielding dumpsters and improving landscaping

Support, plan, implement and possibly help fund gateway improvements

From CAT:

Adopt plan

Explore other locations for Transit Center

From MPC/Historic District Board of Review/CUTS:

Adopt plan

Continue to monitor and enforce Chadbourn guidelines

Study and make recommendations on I-16 flyover removal

Keep corridor pedestrian needs in mind in East-West Corridor study

Allow "fast food row" re-do, should one additional fast food wish to locate on corridor.

From SCAD

Reference plan

Support pedestrian plans

From Savannah Housing Authority

Adopt plan

Cross-reference plan with other SHA plans

**Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce and
Convention and Visitors Bureau**

Adopt Plan

Continue to assist in business retention and
recruitment functions on corridor

Support and advocate gateway elements and
community-wide directional sign plan

From churches on corridor

Adopt plan

Share with congregation members

Actively look for appropriate ways to implement
elements of plan

From State Department of Transportation

Adopt plan

Incorporate transportation elements in plans

Fund changes to I-16 flyover

Appendices

Appendix 1:

Role of Stakeholders in the Planning and Implementation Process

The Savannah Development and Renewal Authority (SDRA) Board of Directors

The SDRA is governed by a Board of Directors who are appointed by the Mayor and Alderman of the City of Savannah. The Board of Directors is composed of 25 volunteers ranging from Downtown business people, residents, and citizens from across the City. The Board of Directors ensures that the SDRA adhere to guidelines set forth by the Georgia General Assembly, as well as adhere to the mission of the organization, which is as follows: To lead a coordinated strategy of economic development and civic design to strengthen Downtown Savannah.

The Savannah Development and Renewal Authority (SDRA) Technical Advisory Board (TAB)

The TAB consists of professionals with experience in Downtown development and representatives of key constituency groups Downtown. These volunteers provide added input and support on all issues discussed by the Board of Directors.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd/Montgomery Street Corridor Committee

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd/Montgomery Street Task Force (now the SDRA's MLK/Montgomery Corridor Committee) was formed in October 1995. The Committee organized to develop a workable plan that would identify redevelopment goals and strategies for the revitalization of the corridor.