



## Part III

# Comprehensive Development Plan

## Commercial Areas Study

Georgetown,  
South Carolina



# COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

## PART III

### COMMERCIAL AREAS STUDY

#### ABSTRACT

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**ABSTRACT:**

This report identifies some of the traffic and aesthetic problems in the commercial areas of Georgetown, and outlines plans for alleviating these problems.

This report is an integral part of the community's efforts to plan comprehensively for the future development of the City of Georgetown.

The objectives of the report are to determine the effectiveness of existing commercial operations and areas in the City of Georgetown, to identify any problems relating to or inhibiting the realization of the full economic potential of these operations, and finally, to recommend ways in which these areas and operations may be improved to the mutual benefit of the merchants, the customers and the general public.

Suffice it to say, the effectiveness of any commercial establishment or aggregate business area depends on:

- (1) good merchandising techniques and sales management;
- (2) a representative selection of goods and services;
- (3) easy accessibility;
- (4) convenient and inexpensive, if not free, customer parking; and
- (5) the prevention and elimination of blighted conditions.

For analytical purposes, the above conditions may be subdivided into two categories, merchandising and physical facilities.

The operation of an individual commercial establishment, including the responsibility of customer service and sales policy, and the size of its inventory, constitutes the merchandising elements of a business. And in many cases, the margin of profit or the possible failure of a business may depend on these elements. Physical facilities notwithstanding, a poorly run business may be doomed to failure.

It is not the intent of this report, however, to evaluate the merchandising techniques employed by the individual store operators in Georgetown. It goes without saying

## FRONT STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT

Georgetown's commercial center, located on Front Street between Fraser and Cannon Streets, is a bit unique in three respects: one, it has no traffic lights; two, it is contiguous to a river; and three, it is not congested with through traffic. Moreover, the downtown area has some very distinguished historical landmarks in and immediately adjacent to it; it is easily accessible from most any area in the community; and in general, it has the potential to become an outstanding regional commercial center and tourist attraction. But, it is not without physical problems and as a result, has not realized its full economic potential.

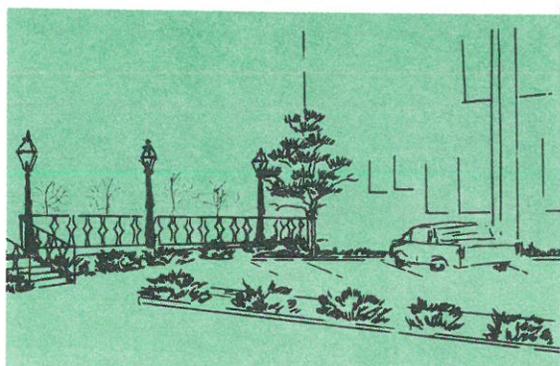
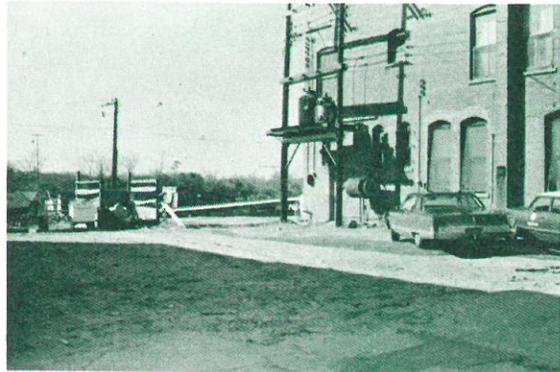
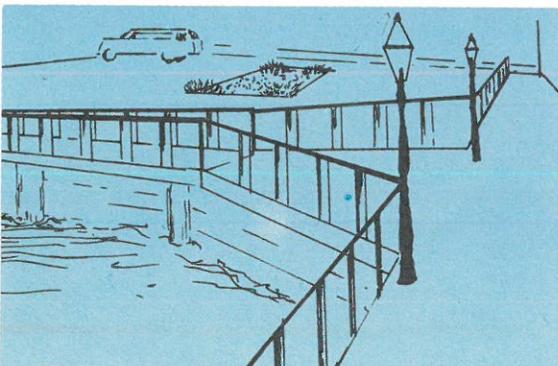
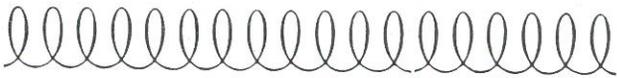
that modern business techniques, considerate customer service, adequate inventory, competitive prices and overall sales policy are essential to a successful operation.

Assuming the merchandising techniques employed by Georgetown's merchants are satisfactory or, where problems exist, sufficient changes will be made to provide for improved merchandising operations, a determination of what must be done to improve the physical facilities in the City's commercial areas is then in order. Toward this end the remainder of this report is dedicated.

There are basically two business districts or areas in Georgetown, the central commercial district located on Front Street and a secondary commercial aggregation striped along Fraser Street. The types of commercial services and goods provided by each of the districts, and a good many of the problems confronting the two districts, are quite discernable. Therefore, problems peculiar to and techniques for improving the two districts will be discussed separately.

### General Appearance

The general appearance of Front Street could be improved substantially. Alleys and vacant lots contiguous to Front Street are unsightly and in need of major yard and building renovations. Areas that are now used for parking should be properly designed and landscaped. This would not only improve the looks of the area but, in all probability, increase the capacity of the lots for parking. The sides and rear building walls should be renovated.

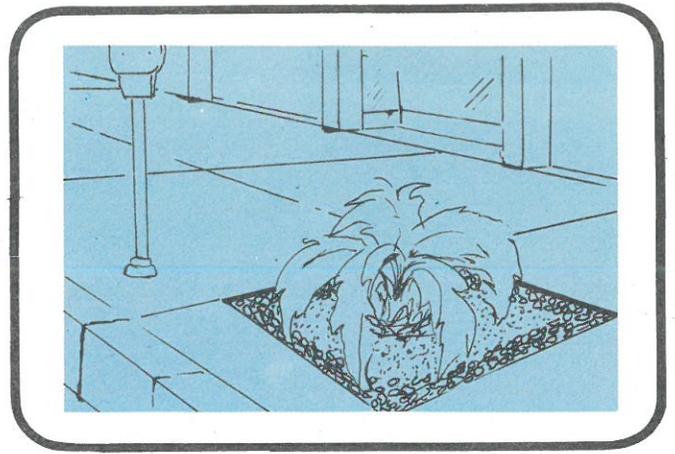




Past efforts to improve the general appearance of the City included spotting "potted palmetto trees" along Front Street. The idea had merit, but the pots have not been adequately maintained, and the palmettos actually detract from the appearance of the City in their present condition. They could be improved appreciably.

Vacant and rundown buildings are in evidence in the central business district. The aggregate effect of these buildings on the "shopping environment" is considerable. An unattractive and potentially blighted downtown provides little incentive to area residents and tourists to visit and shop in Georgetown. Moreover, a weak commercial center invites the competition of large shopping centers, which have sounded the deathknell of many outdated commercial areas.

Georgetown is awakening to this situation, however. Several previously vacated buildings on Front Street are now being renovated. And undoubtedly, these



changes will improve the general appearance of the commercial center. But unfortunately, these renovations are being made without benefit of an overall design scheme for improving the downtown. Such a plan for improvement is presented on the reverse side of this report and should be used as a base for all future building changes. The design scheme is intended to create a unique and attractive commercial core -- one that has uniformity of architectural style in keeping with Georgetown's rich historical image.

One of the most unsightly areas in downtown Georgetown is the waterfront. It is an ugly mass of rotted wharves and unsafe piers, and ironically, is the one thing that sets Georgetown apart from most cities, providing it with tremendous economic potential. To capitalize on this dormant potential, however, a complete renovation of the waterfront is a prerequisite. A suggested design scheme for rebuilding the waterfront is presented on the reverse side of this report.



# Traffic and Parking

Georgetown's central business district is unlike most, where the major highway serving the town goes right through the center of town, carrying travelers to and through the commercial core. Such a system usually causes traffic congestion, parking problems, and inconvenience to shoppers, but it does require the traveler and potential customer to at least go through the center of town, subsequently exposing him to the stores and shops in the area.

So while Georgetown does not have the problems associated with a major highway carrying heavy traffic volumes through its commercial center, it is confronted with the task of developing a central commercial area strong enough to "pull" potential customers into the downtown.

Presently, customer traffic is not a serious problem on Front Street. Granted, parking maneuvers inhibit to a degree the movement of traffic, but then, the purpose of Front Street is not to move traffic, but rather to provide access to and parking for existing commercial buildings. It is quite conceivable, however, that as customer traffic increases, the diagonal parking on Front Street will have to be changed to parallel parking or that Front Street will have to be changed to a one-way street, or possibly, that the sidewalks will have to be nar-

rowed to allow for additional traffic lanes. But for now, no major changes of the downtown street system, or the diagonal parking arrangement on Front Street, or the narrowing of the sidewalks are recommended.

FIGURE 1

## DOWNTOWN PARKING

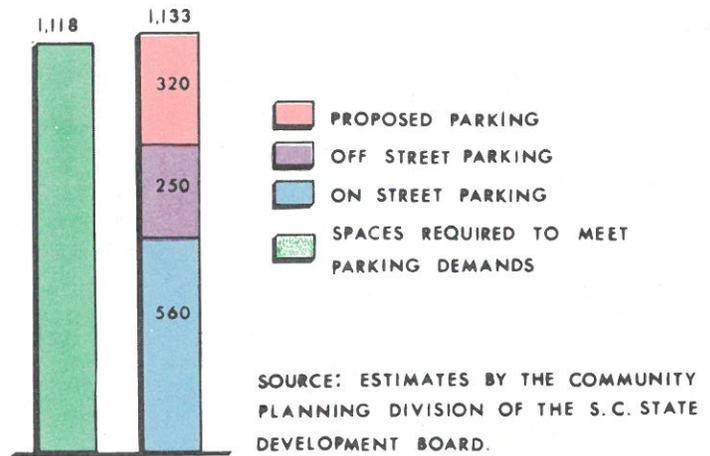
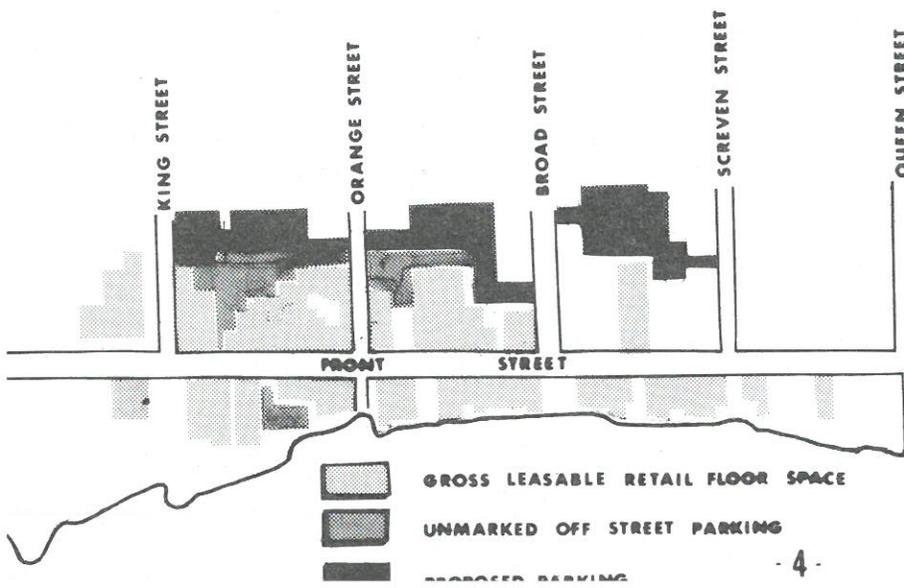


FIGURE 2

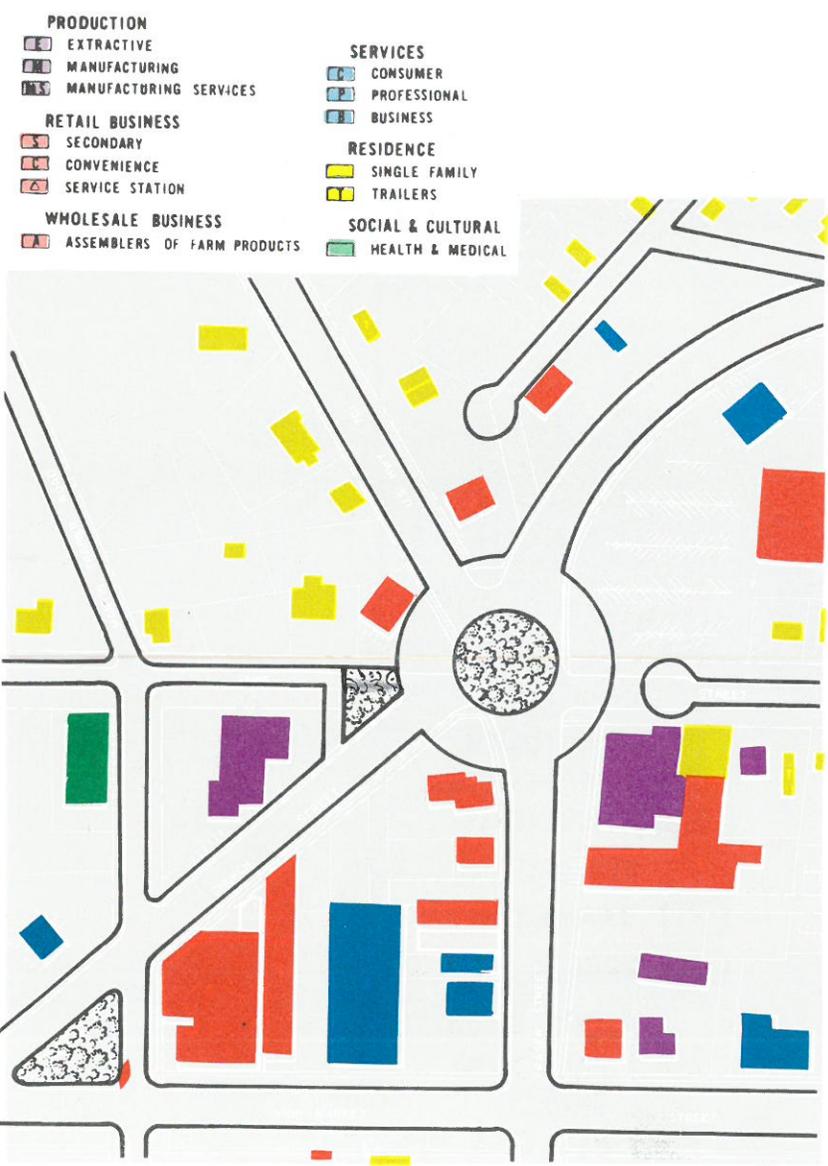
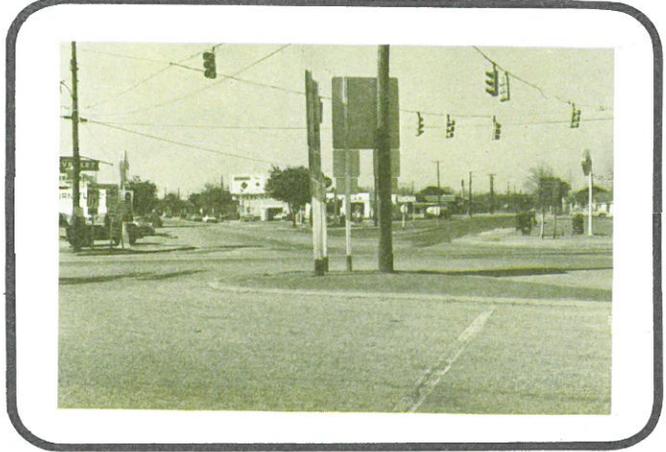
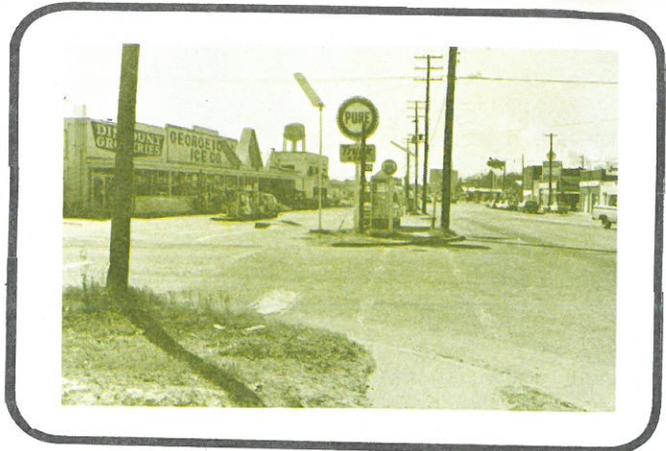


The parking situation in the downtown area is inadequate by most standards, including those established by the Community Builders Council, a group of businessmen appointed by the Urban Land Institute to work with problems of commercial and residential areas. The Council recommends six spaces per 1,000 feet of Gross Leasable Retail Floor Space. As shown by Figure 1, onstreet parking provides approximately half of this amount. To meet the requirements established by the Council, 558 additional parking spaces will be needed in downtown Georgetown. If the land designated as offstreet parking in Figure 2 is paved and landscaped for parking it will provide 250 additional spaces and bring the total number of parking spaces up to two-thirds of the need. If the land designated in Figure 2 as proposed parking is secured and converted into parking, the parking total will be raised to 1,133, thus exceeding by 15 spaces the requirements of the Community Builders Council.

Having satisfied existing parking needs, future parking requirements could be met through the prudent administration of the zoning ordinance, which requires that sufficient customer parking space be provided for all new businesses.

# FRASER STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT

Fraser Street provides access to Georgetown Steel and the City's Secondary Commercial District, accommodating such uses as auto sales and services, supermarkets, appliance and furniture stores, insurance companies, etc. It also serves as the major north-south route (U.S. 17) through the City and had in 1968 average daily traffic volumes of 12,200 vehicles. But it neither provides access nor moves traffic satisfactorily. The street is becoming increasingly congested, and is in need of resurfacing and widening to four lanes. The major thoroughfare plan notwithstanding, these improvements are urgently needed.



Another area of major concern is the seven-way interchange at the junction of Church and Fraser Streets. It is a major traffic bottleneck and potentially dangerous intersection. The redesign of the interchange, closing and altering three of the streets intersecting at the point and establishing a landscaped traffic circle would improve the area considerably. It would provide for unimpeded traffic flow, reduce the potential for accidents, and add substantially to the beautification efforts presently underway in the City.

These suggested street improvements, coupled with business renovations, could serve as an economic stimulant for this presently deteriorating secondary commercial area.

## IMPLEMENTATION

A project the size of the one outlined in this report will require marshalling of both private and public resources, including municipal, state and federal.

### Private Participation

The bulk of the responsibility for getting the plan off the ground will fall on the downtown merchants. If the Front Street Business District is to be improved, the merchants in the area will have to take the initiative to get the project underway and secure public assistance and acceptance.

Actually, a "steering committee" of the merchants should be appointed to take charge of the project and coordinate the activities of all participating agencies.

### Public Participation

The merchants have a great deal of financial and technical assistance available to them from all levels of government. The question that needs answering however, is how much and from whom?

The City is in a position to help channel state and federal funds into the project area. Many of the requirements of these agencies are predicated on the formulation of a Comprehensive Plan, and the relationship of the project to the City's overall planning program -- showing how the project is designed to implement, in part, or is consistent with the City's comprehensive plan.

The City has completed and is now actively involved in the implementation of such a planning program, and therefore has met some of the requirements established for grant assistance.

Also, the City will have to serve as the applicant for grant and loan assistance, and be required to pledge local funds in order to secure matching grant federal funds. It is essential, therefore, for the merchants and City officials to establish

a cohesive working relationship. Local assistance also may be required from the County delegation and County Commissioners.

The State is in a position to assist through either direct or indirect participation. Direct assistance is available from the Highway Department for improving and widening Fraser Street and possibly installing the proposed traffic circle at the intersection of Fraser and Church Streets.

Indirect assistance is available from the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, the applicant agency for grant funds from the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. As such, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism is responsible for processing grant requests for recreational improvements and facilities. And, since a number of facilities proposed in this report are eligible for grant consideration, including dock and historic site development, assistance from the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism should be secured.

Federal assistance is available from a number of different agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Small Business Administration, and the previously mentioned Department of the Interior. Specific programs administered by these agencies that could be of possible assistance in implementing the proposed commercial areas plan range from small business loans for improving old and initiating new business operations from the S B A, to outright grants for urban beautification, and historic preservation from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The degree of participation by each of the above mentioned agencies will depend on the solicitation of their assistance and extent of acceptability of the individual improvements and facilities that make up the aggregate Plan.

Suffice it to say, project implementation will require aggressive local leadership and the determination of job accomplishment, anything short of which will undoubtedly fail.