

HISTORIC HATTIESBURG DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION

STRATEGIC PLAN

2009-2014

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TRENT LOTT NATIONAL CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following is an executive summary of the document entitled Historic Hattiesburg Downtown Association Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014. A comprehensive report is available upon request. Completed June 18, 2009.

INTRODUCTION

Historic Hattiesburg Downtown Association (HHDA) in conjunction with the Trent Lott National Center for Excellence in Economic Development and Entrepreneurship (Lott Center) and the Area Development Partnership (ADP) have collaborated in the development of this HHDA Strategic Plan. This process began in 2008 with the development of the outline, scope of work, and the expected timeline for delivery. Over the past 9 months, numerous community meetings have been held wherein key stakeholders were identified and invited to participate in the strategic plan development process. The following represents the synopsis of the information gained through these meetings.

PLAN OF STUDY

Overview:

The purpose of this summary is to review the scope of work conducted by Dr. Brent Hales and graduate assistants during the 2008 fall semester. Specifically, Dr. Hales, students and HHDA staff and volunteers conducted assessments of the historic downtown Hattiesburg to determine its current assets, opportunities for development, retail gaps, and funding alternatives.

Scope of Work:

The following items have been completed:

- Meetings with HHDA and its partners to determine desired goals for the project.
- Secondary data analysis on the region as defined by project goals. This included analyses of:
 - Number of employees downtown
 - Activities for people after hours
 - Parking and transportation
 - Sales tax revenue
 - Property available
 - Potential funding opportunities using
 - Go Zone funds
 - CDBG

- Tax-increment financing
 - New Market Tax Credits
 - Other grants
- Focus groups with representatives from the business community, civic organizations, and key government personnel.
- Development of individual questionnaires
- Key informant surveys assessing individual respondents' perceptions:
- Data analyses
- Generation of preliminary reports of focus group discussion and individual key informant survey results
- Reports to HHDA and its partners on the results of the survey
- Assist HHDA and its partners to identify key steps with benchmarks for implementing recommendations

GOALS FOR THE PROJECT

Goals have been identified by the HHDA Board of Directors for this project.

- Identify key resources for project development
- Identify sources of data that will enable the Board to make better informed decisions.
Data sources included:
 - Number of employees downtown
 - Activities for people after hours
 - Parking
 - Sales tax revenue
 - Property values
 - Property available
 - Business list development
 - Traffic counts
- Identify potential sources of income or revenue that might pay for development of projects identified. Preliminary funding sources include:
 - Go Zone funds
 - CDBG
 - Tax-increment financing
 - New Market Tax Credits
 - Other grants
- Identify key stakeholders to participate in visioning activities targeting strategic projects that the Board can initiate over the next five years
- Indicate benchmarks and evaluation procedures for determination of project success

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

Downtown Area

The downtown area of the City of Hattiesburg is located east of Highway 49, west of the Leaf River, south of Highway 42 and north of Laurel Avenue. Regional access to the site is provided by Highway 49, Interstate 59, Highway 98, Highway 11, and Highway 42. One-way pairs provide the majority of the automobile circulation through the downtown area on W. Front Street, eastbound, and on W. Pine Street, westbound.

Number of Employees

Business owners were contacted to determine the total number of employees currently employed in the HHDA region (April/May 2009). As the United States is currently reeling from a large-scale economic downturn, the results of the analysis may fail to capture an accurate picture of the potential for employment in the current businesses. As the economy improves, it is anticipated that these numbers will significantly increase. As of May 2009, approximately 2023 persons were employed in the HHDA region. Twenty-one businesses did not respond to queries regarding their total number of employees. Businesses were reluctant to provide salary information therefore; that information is not included.

Activities

The City of Hattiesburg provides a number of activities for its residents and tourists designed to increase the quality of life and promote business to the region. Specific recommendations for activities are provided later in the strategic plan.

Parking

There are a total of 4,373 parking spaces in down town.

Of the total,

- 1,305 are city owned off street
- 177 are on street and
- 2,891 are off street, privately owned

The majority of parking downtown is controlled by the city and the county. The county maintains parking lots throughout downtown to ensure people needing to do business with the county have a place to park. County departments have in recent months begun to allow general public visitors to use their parking lots around lunch time. The City of Hattiesburg maintains and leases the following parking lots: Pine Street Garage, Civic Center Garage, Mobile Street

Lot, Main Street Lot, Railroad Street Lot, Hemphill Street Lot, East Pine Street Lot, and First Baptist Church Lot.

The downtown region has numerous lots that are available for use. However, many of the spaces are leased by businesses and entities not within a reasonable proximity of the business site. Several businesses have more spots allocated/leased than employees thereby making available parking limited for residential and commercial use and/or development. The impacts of the parking space allocation arose in every focus group, key informant, and community wide meeting.

Recommendations for the re-allocation of parking spaces is located in comprehensive strategic planning document.

5-YEAR NESTED DEVELOPMENT PLAN

A series of community meetings determined those projects that participants will undertake in the next 5 years. Nested development is based on the idea that the potential impacts of projects increase if they are built on the successes and/or lessons learned from previously implemented projects.

Successful development is based on the principles of holistic development or notion of PRAISE. This method of development encourages the development of projects that are:

- **Proactive** – assesses current opportunities and makes plans for the future to take advantage of arising opportunities rather than reacting to internal and external pressures.
- **Representative** – projects undertaken accurately reflects the interested community which they represent (demographics, culture, identity).
- **Asset** (resource) based – is built off of the existing resources and uses external resources to augment rather than drive the development process.
- **Inclusive** – includes groups from the community that may or may not historically have participated in the development process. Specifically, an inclusive project includes representation from the business, civic, and governmental organizations/entities in the region.
- **Sustainable** – focuses on local ownership of the projects and seeks to increase the viability of the region by using local sources of labor, resources, and human capital.
- **Equitable** – the benefits of the development initiative are distributed equally across the community of interest.

Similarly, successful development programs are based on the 5 “tions” of sustainable development. These are:

- **Promotion** – increases the likelihood that proposed activities of the group will succeed and have an impact on the region. The effort may initially focus on activities that

produce measurable and visible results. Such a focus will increase the group's visibility and encourage participation by entities that may not have participated, or fully participated in the development of the council.

- **Implementation** – great plans are only effective when fully implemented. Effective implementation insures involvement by all vested parties, increases the capacity of the organization to achieve its goals, and capitalizes on the strengths of its members.
- **Documentation** – effective groups move forward by understanding where they have been. Documentation will provide a base of knowledge to ascertain the impacts of the group's efforts. The group should document all meetings of the council with general minutes, pictures, and reflections by the group. All financial activities are closely monitored and documented to insure sound fiscal practice.
- **Evaluation** – enables the organization to periodically examine its effectiveness in addressing the needs of the region with its resources. Evaluation also enables the organization to assess whether it is functioning effectively. It has the potential to refocus the council and providing direction for future change. Groups that consistently evaluate performance and council involvement by holding regular meetings of the Board of Directors and by completing an annual evaluation and strategic planning session increase the likelihood of sustainability. Evaluation forces the group to closely examine whether its efforts are reflective of the region and if the council has strayed from its mission. Benchmarks provide a template for structuring the council's future activities, allow the group to build on past successes and learn from its struggles, thereby decreasing the likelihood that similar mistakes will happen in the future.
- **Celebration** – the activities and projects of the organization can be promoted and celebrated after the fact. Celebration may be formal or informal. It may be as little as recognizing the efforts of group members at council meetings or as large as formal awards ceremonies. One effective form of celebration is to use the media to showcase the efforts of the group. The use of the media and celebration increases interest and buy-in at the local level. It has also increases the potential outreach capability of the council. In the founding of the organization, council members must actively attract potential members for the organization.

The top 5 most important projects to the HHDA region are as follows:

- **Gordon's Creek**
 - Drainage
 - Beautification
- **Marketing/Promotion**
 - **Comprehensive material development**

- **Parking**
 - Identification of available spaces and possible expansion
- **Transportation**
 - Overpasses/underpasses
 - Rerouting of big trucks
 - Gateways/linkages to and from
 - Relocation of rail yard
- **Undeveloped/unoccupied buildings**
 - Code enforcement

In order to develop a nested strategic plan, respondents identified a number of reachable goals to work on in the next three months (May 2009-August 2009), six months (May 2009-November/December 2009), the next year (May 2009-May 2010), the next two years (May 2009-May 2011), and the next five years (May 2009-May 2014). HHDA is encouraged to focus on attaining measurable success that will produce results, encourage community participation, and have a high return on investment. These were specific to community and economic development efforts in the region.

In each project, participants identified several indicators that will increase the likelihood of greater community participation and ultimately the success of the project. Additional project details are outlined in the comprehensive report. Below is the project list.

- **Reformation of the Parking and Transportation Committee**
- **Establishment of Gordon's Creek Planning Team**
- **Code Enforcement Action Team**
- **Historic High School Concert/Special Events Team**
- **Public Art Plan Implementation Team**

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Uses of Available Resources

A considerable amount of time and effort was used to create a list of resources available in the region. To this end, it is expected and encouraged that these resources be used to conduct development efforts. In all projects, it is recommended that these resources be carefully reviewed to determine how they can and should be used as appropriate.

Potential Partnerships

In addition to physical resources listed in the resource directory, the section on social capital specifically focuses on potential partnerships that could be used for the region's development. It is recommended that these be used and regularly updated in the development process. As such, it may be necessary to conduct annual assessments of existing resources at some level. This will insure that all of the potential resources available to the board and to the communities are effectively leveraged.

It is also recommended that HHDA establish regional partnerships with other counties in close proximity to capitalize on collective resources and efforts.

Evaluation

In any development process, it is requisite that those involved in the process routinely reevaluate their development plans and strategies. It is also necessary to document the successes, pitfalls, and resources available to the board so as to promote positive change. Evaluation of current practices, utilization of funds, and the value of the return on the investment will prove beneficial to this process. It is recommended that an external reviewer or evaluator be identified to conduct annual evaluations of the project, to generate reports to be provided to the HHDA board and to the communities in the County regarding the efforts of the projects, and to provide meaningful feedback to board members and to the communities as to future directions for development. This evaluator should be identified in the near future so as to have an idea of the process that the organization has undergone in this effort. It is recommended that the Mississippi Main Street Association assist with this evaluation process.

Conclusion:

The Historic Hattiesburg Downtown Association and the projects that it and its partners have put forth have the potential for sparking change in the region. This can and will happen if all parties maintain an involved and interested presence in this process. All parties, communities, and organizations represented at the meetings and those not represented at the meetings or on the Board of Directors have vested interests in making such happen. No community in the 21st century can stand alone in an era of globalizing economies and reductions in governmental spending at the State and Federal levels. Successful ventures of this nature are not unique to Forrest County, the State of Mississippi, or the United States.

In sum, HHDA has the potential to enact real change in the region. However, its success will rely on the residents, business owners, and regional partners taking ownership of the efforts and getting behind its efforts. HHDA must continue to work collaboratively with local governments, civic organizations, and the business community in order to provide itself as a mechanism for change in the region.

