

DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION &
ECONOMIC
ASSISTANCE FOR
MISSOURI

MARKETING PLAN
AUGUST 2012

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Macon has several assets that will aid the community as it moves forward with plans to revitalize its Downtown. While small, the community already has in place an organization with the sole focus of advancing Downtown interests, the Mainstreet Macon Downtown Association (MMDA). It also has a great local theater community, access to a state park with fishing, camping and hiking and annual events, such as the Fork and Cork Festival and the Boots and Black Tie fundraiser.

Downtown Macon, especially, has some outstanding business owners offering great products and quality service. Many business people and civic leaders work in Downtown everyday, giving the area a concentration of talented professionals. It is these people which give the area such potential for growth. Downtown should utilize these existing assets of business savvy, entrepreneurship and civic leadership to develop and sustain a reputation for quality. The goal of the marketing plan is to improve the sense of identity and level of participation within Downtown, both locally and regionally. An identity which builds upon the assets of the business owners, civic institutions, events and history. An identity of a place of quality: quality people, quality service, quality experience.

However, Downtown Macon is not without its challenges, including some empty storefronts and definite infrastructure enhancements. The MMDA, in association with the city and chamber, is working hard to revitalize Downtown, but as a volunteer-driven effort without funds, the task has been difficult. Many community

residents also say they are not likely to visit Downtown for their shopping needs and prefer instead to drive to the larger nearby cities of Columbia and Kirksville. To create sustainable and long-lasting impacts for the community, Macon's marketing and communications efforts should focus on supporting five primary objectives, listed as follows:

Objective 1: Strengthen the Mainstreet Macon Downtown Association

Establish consistent funding sources, leadership, and presence for the organization within the community to increase its impact exponentially.

Objective 2: Expand Downtown retail sales and encourage business investment

Unite community stakeholders to empower small business owners to operate in Downtown and provide additional support for existing businesses.

Objective 3: Encourage tourism in Downtown Macon

Capitalize on existing events to draw new visitors and reach entirely new audiences.

Several strategies and tactics are outlined throughout this plan to help MMDA and other interested parties move the needle in these critical areas. Many of the recommendations can be enacted immediately at little to no cost. However, others would require additional research, time and financial investment on the part of the City of Macon, the Macon Area Chamber of Commerce, Macon County Economic Development, or other interested parties.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Macon is located in north central Missouri and is known as the "City of Maples" with over 275,000 maple trees. It is home to nearly 5,500 residents and is the county seat of Macon County (county population 15,566).

In addition to pulling visitors from the City of Macon and throughout Macon County, Downtown Macon has the opportunity to draw from nearby communities, both small and large, including:

- Atlanta (population 385; 12 miles from Macon)
- Bevier (population 718; seven miles from Macon)
- Callao (population 292; 10 miles from Macon)
- Columbia (fifth largest City in Missouri with a population of 108,500; 60 miles from Macon)
- Kirksville (population of 17,505; 34 miles from Macon)
- LaPlata (population 1,366; 21 miles from Macon)
- Moberly (population 14,227; 25 miles from Macon)
- New Cambria (population 195; 17 miles from Macon)

Macon is a draw for hunting and fishing enthusiasts due to its location near the 1,800

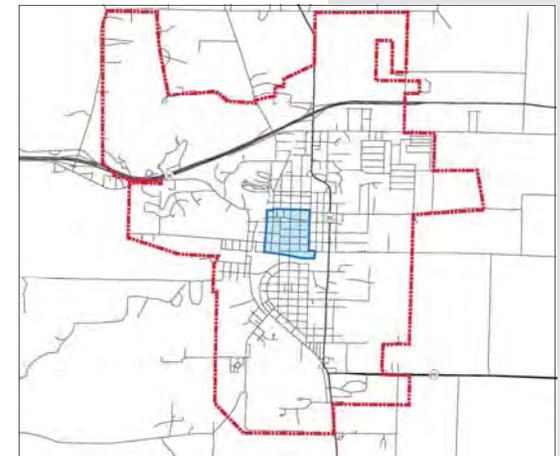
-acre Long Branch State Park and Long Branch Lake. The state's Atlanta-Long Branch Conservation area provides a shooting range and a wildlife viewing platform for visitors. Macon is also home to the Maples Repertory Theatre Company, which is a regional draw for theater fans and actors, who often spend their whole summer in Macon while they are performing in the company. The town also boasts the nation's largest exotic animal sale, held four times a year and drawing visitors from across the United States. The city also hosts a large truck and tractor pull every summer.

The largest annual Downtown Macon event is the Fork and Cork Festival, which is celebrating its fourth year in 2011. The event features a run/walk, sales at Downtown shops, an art festival, a farmer's market, a classic car show, food and live music. This event, which launched in 2008, is sponsored by the Mainstreet Macon Downtown Association (MMDA). The Maples Theatre also sponsors a large annual fundraising event Downtown called Boots and Black Tie.

While residents and visitors alike agreed during phone and in-person surveys that Downtown Macon is headed in the right direction, the area is facing some marketing challenges. While Downtown has shopping opportunities – primarily at J.P.'s and Ben Franklin – most residents say they must travel



Macon County Courthouse.



Map of the city (in red) showing location of Downtown Macon (in blue).

Macon, Missouri

to other towns, such as Columbia and Kirksville, to do any significant shopping.

Some visitors and residents complained that Downtown Macon is not pedestrian friendly and needs more parking closer to shops and restaurants. Also, many of the Downtown shops close at or before 6 p.m. on weekends, many restaurants close at or before 8 p.m. and many aren't open past noon or 1 p.m. on Saturdays. Some say these hours make it difficult for them to visit the Downtown area.

There is a lack of signage along nearby roads directing travelers to Downtown, specifically at key intersections. A simple and well defined wayfinding system would be very helpful especially for out of town visitors.

Due to the general visual clutter and lack of architectural character found along these typical highway environments, Downtown has an opportunity to enhance it's uniqueness as a traditional American downtown. Improvements to the edge, especially along Vine and Rollins Streets, and to the building facades throughout the area will help to distinguish Downtown as a destination which is unique and of a higher quality, distinct from the highway corridor areas.

Downtown Macon's buildings have experi-

enced transformation through the years. Unfortunately, much of the transformation has been to a negative effect through the installation of inappropriate siding, awnings, signage, and neglect. Rehabilitation of the building facades is a needed improvement which could contribute to the identity of Downtown. There are also a few buildings/spaces in Downtown which are vacant. These structures/sites have varying levels of maintenance and can unfortunately present a negative image for Downtown.

Efforts to revitalize Downtown Macon with a fresh marketing approach come at a particularly important time for the Mainstreet Macon Downtown Association. The eight-member board recently appointed it's third new president in just the last three years.



Example of current wayfinding signage for visitors to Downtown Macon.



Downtown buildings at the corner of Vine and Rollins Streets.

Stakeholder Organizations

In addition to the MMDA, which advocates specifically for Downtown, a number of other groups are invested in the future of Downtown Macon, including:

- **City of Macon**, which is the governing body of the community that includes the Downtown area and the decision-maker for planning, zoning, tax and funding allocations that impact Downtown.
- **Macon Area Chamber of Commerce**, whose mission is to promote the Macon community, support existing businesses and encourage economic growth. The Chamber holds several annual events, including a golf tournament, fireworks display, Fork & Cork Festival, and a Christmas parade.
- **Macon County Economic Development (MCED)**, which focuses on attracting new businesses to the area, providing site selection services, organizing business training, and assisting entrepreneurs.
- **Macon County Government**, which is the governing body of Macon County and based in the City of Macon.
- **Macon County Historical Society**, whose mission is to collect, preserve and arrange historical, religious, scientific and educational material relative to the beginning, growth and development of Macon County.
- **Macon Municipal Utilities**, which is the financial source for the City.

The successful growth of Downtown will rely on keeping these groups informed and engaged. If they are truly invested in the process, it will open up new opportunities for the MMDA to leverage the strengths of these organizations – their assets, their communications tools, and their people.

Existing Communication Tools

The MMDA has several available communication channels through which it can push its message and mission about improving Downtown Macon, including a dedicated website, Facebook page and Twitter account. However, currently the organization is not taking full advantage of the networks it has already created to communicate with interested members of the public. The Facebook and Twitter pages are updated sporadically with posts about local events – posts in late March and April 2011 were not followed up with another post until July 16.

Additionally, the MMDA website appears to be a placeholder site meant to maintain the URL of macon-downtown.com for future use, instead of a site devoted to current events and information about Downtown. At the moment, the site includes only some detailed information about the Fork and



The Maples Repertory Theatre brings people and visitors to Downtown Macon.



The MMDA website at www.macon-downtown.com.

Cork Festival (which occurred Aug. 27, 2011), a Downtown business directory, a Google map and contact information for individual members of MMDA. The site should be optimized to engage and inform the community about Downtown initiatives. Specific recommendations are detailed in Objective 1 of the following plan.

Several of the stakeholder organizations have websites that promote activities in Macon. Macon County Economic Development has a website (www.maconcounty.org) with information about the City and County, starting a business, relocating to Macon County, and links to other stakeholder organizations (MMDA is not included here, however). It also has a Facebook page where it posts information about ribbon cuttings, ground breakings and other local development and business news and includes photos.

The City of Macon has a website (cityofmacon-mo.gov) that lists information about living in Macon, local events and local businesses, and includes links on its site to local activities, such as the Maples Repertory Theatre, exotic animal sale, and hunting and fishing locations. While this site provides a good overview of several of Macon's individual attractions, it does not give a good context of their relation to Downtown and other shopping or dining opportunities while visiting Macon.

The Macon Area Chamber of Commerce (www.maconmochamber.com) website is also

fairly generic. Users are presented with a list of events and calendar, but the site does not offer an online photo tour or detailed maps. There is an interactive 16-page color brochure on the site titled "Macon Area Profile & Visitor's Guide." This presentation provides a great introduction to the community, complete with photos and sidebars on many of the important historical, economic, and cultural elements of the City of Macon.

The Macon County Historical Society website (www.maconcountyhistoricalsociety.com) page appears to be a repository for genealogy enthusiasts, but it also contains information on meetings, events, tours, and books around Macon County. The site has several links to other various organization websites, including Downtown Macon.

There are several traditional and digital resources that businesses and tourists can use to find information about Macon, but little showcasing Downtown. A Google search of "Macon, Missouri Downtown" yields results pointing to current real estate listings and eBay auctions. None of the previously listed websites show up on the first page of search results. Just Googling "Macon, Missouri" does bring up several of the city's official sites on the first page of search results. The chamber site is second (after a Wikipedia entry) and the city's official website is the fourth result.



Macon County Economic Development website page.



Macon Area Chamber of Commerce website page.

Local Media

In addition to its proprietary communications tools, MMDA and others have the opportunity to leverage local media outlets to advance Downtown interests.

Macon's daily newspaper is the *Macon Chronicle Herald*, which is also available online. In addition, the *Kirksville Daily Express* sometimes includes stories about Macon. Radio stations based in Macon include KLTJ, a country station and KIRK, an easy listening station. Television stations covering Macon news include KTVO 3.

The MMDA appears to have not established a strong effort to drive coverage in local media so far. A review of stories shows that only one item focused specifically on the Downtown area not related to the Fork and Cork Festival has appeared since winter 2010, when the paper ran a photo of two members of the local Future Business Leaders of America putting up Christmas decorations Downtown. The paper did include a photo in October 2008 when Macon was made one of the D.R.E.A.M. communities, but no stories appear to have been written about the effort. However, the local station has run a couple of stories about D.R.E.A.M. Moving forward, the opportunity exists to build MMDA's relationships with the media while, at the same time, providing interesting content for readers about Downtown revitalization efforts.



Website for the Macon Chronicle-Herald newspaper.

MARKETING PLAN OVERVIEW

Marketing and communications will bring to light the new activity in Downtown Macon and reinforce the area's importance to the community as a whole. A sustained marketing effort will help improve Downtown Macon's reputation, draw small businesses and visitors and strengthen the sense of community for current residents. It will take a fully integrated approach – combining the use of earned media, community outreach, events and social media networks – to make it a reality.

The MMDA has limited resources to execute a large-scale marketing effort at this time. Therefore, recommendations in the following plan center less on building communications tools and more on strategically leveraging existing assets to achieve Macon's objectives for the Downtown area.

To build credibility and sustain a successful marketing campaign, any plan proposed must be embraced by and driven by the community. With support from the sponsoring agencies of the DREAM Initiative – the Missouri Development Finance Board, Missouri Department of Economic Development and Missouri Housing Development Commission – a Macon-based organization should lead this effort.

Because of its mandate to advance the interests of Downtown, it is recommended that MMDA lead the charge. However, a coalition of community partners, including the Chamber and Macon County Economic Development, should be called upon to provide both guidance and support.

Audiences

Following is a list of the five primary audiences for the Downtown Macon marketing and communications campaign, along with objectives when addressing each audience:

- **First-time visitors** – Successful outreach to first-time visitors will focus on those with a niche interest in visiting Macon, such as wine lovers, hunters and theater-goers. This outreach will notify visitors of locations, projects and events relative to their interests.
- **Local business owners** – Successful outreach to business leaders will promote business opportunities as well as available business resources and tools.
- **Long-time residents of Central Missouri** – Successful outreach to this audience will focus primarily on reaching Macon County opinion leaders. It will communicate benefits of visiting, living, working or owning a business in Downtown Macon and include the area's recreational and entertainment opportunities.
- **New residents** – Successful outreach to new residents will focus on educating these residents about what Macon has to offer. According to the local research and polling, new residents were very enthusiastic about the Downtown area and possible revitalization.
- **Out-of-town regular visitors with family in Macon** – Successful outreach to this audience will focus on helping these visitors see Downtown Macon in a new way, emphasizing the opportunities for recreation, entertainment and the annual family-friendly events.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES:

The following text outlines the specific objectives and strategies for the marketing of Downtown Macon. Each of the goals are discussed in greater detail on the following pages.

Objective 1: Strengthen the Mainstreet Macon Downtown Association

Establish consistent funding sources, leadership, and presence for the organization within the community to increase its impact exponentially.

Objective 2: Expand Downtown retail sales and encourage business investment

Unite community stakeholders to empower small business owners to operate in Downtown and provide additional support for existing businesses.

Objective 3: Encourage tourism in Downtown Macon

Capitalize on existing events to draw new visitors and reach entirely new audiences.



Scenes from Downtown Macon.

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**OBJECTIVE 1: Strengthen the Mainstreet Macon
Downtown Association**

Before moving forward with an aggressive marketing strategy for Downtown Macon, it is important for the MMDA to have a solid footing in the community with strong leadership and a clear identity in the minds of community stakeholders.

Strategy 1.1 - Build Leadership

The first step towards accomplishing this goal is for the group to set up a consistent group of leaders and committees with dedicated goals and objectives of their own. In 2007, the MMDA created a committee structure that consisted of Design/Beautification, Organization, Promotion and Economic Restructuring Committees. Variations on those committees should be reestablished or reinforced, with perhaps a committee focused specifically on public relations, including media outreach and social media strategy.

Another thing to consider is the creation of a permanent, paid executive director position. This would help eliminate some of the leadership challenges the group has faced in the past and make sure that there is always someone on hand to accomplish the mission of the MMDA.

Because word-of-mouth was one of the top ways people said they learned about what's happening in Macon, the MMDA should also focus on building a network of key opinion leaders and stakeholders to become advocates for Downtown Macon. One way to do this effectively would be to create a Citizens Advisory Board, consisting of business owners and others active in the community who do not currently sit on the MMDA board. This citizens

group could provide feedback to MMDA and serve as a resource from which the MMDA could draw volunteers for fundraisers and other events.

Strategy 1.2 - Update the Action Plan

In 2007, the MMDA created an Action Plan that outlined its goals for the coming five year period. This document, which included plans for a Downtown "brand," should be updated in 2012 to incorporate the group's marketing priorities, including strategies recommended in this plan. The Action Plan should also reference the committees and assign accountability against implementation of each element in the Action Plan.

Strategy 1.3 - Explore New Fundraising Opportunities

- **Seed the idea of a Downtown CID or TIF with key opinion leaders, and establish an advocacy coalition.** The MMDA should pull together credible third-party advocates that can lobby on the MMDA's behalf. This group should include influencers in the city. Some of them should come from the proposed tax district, but it is not necessary that all live or do business within the CID or TIF boundaries.
- **Equip the advocacy coalition with materials to engage voters.** Set a defined timeline, such as two to three months, for the group to have completed one-on-one meetings with everyone in the voting block. For those meetings, have some information/promotion materials that are of appropriate quality (not glossy or expensive looking). This can include a basic fact sheet on Downtown proposal as well as a Q&A document on CIDs/TIFs in general. Be sure to address:

Target Market:

- Mainstreet Macon Downtown Association
- City of Macon (staff and elected officials)
- Macon County (staff and elected officials)
- Chamber officials and members
- Macon County Economic Development
- Property Owners
- Business Owners
- Residents
- Professionals
- Retirees

1. Potential revenue and jobs that will be generated by a revitalized Downtown
 2. Tangible improvements that would be made to Downtown with new funding
 3. Importance of the funding to the future viability of the community
 4. Information about how increasing sales taxes has a negligible financial impact on retail sales
 5. Examples of other communities in Missouri and throughout the Midwest who have done similar projects successfully, like Downtown Springfield and Columbia
- **Fundraising Events** – The MMDA has the opportunity and should explore the possibility of creating an annual event, similar to the Boots and Black Tie event, which would be strictly a fundraising dinner for organizations. Other event ideas could include a summer barbeque, a golf or fishing tournaments, a raffle in conjunction with hunting season, a fish fry where local fisherman would be encouraged to donate their catch of the day or a trivia night in partnership with the Macon County Historical Society.
 - **Individual Donations** – The Downtown organization should capitalize on the donation button on its website by creating some branding for the donors, such as a “MMDA’s Friends of Macon,” that would better encourage individuals to donate to the Downtown area improvements year-round. This site should be promoted on all MMDA materials. Donors could also receive a token gift of appreciation, such

as a window cling or lapel pin, which would, in turn, help promote a “friends” style group.

Strategy 1.4 - Strengthen Digital Tools

The MMDA should work in the coming months to improve the content available on its website. These improvements can be made within the existing site structure to keep costs at a minimum.

Most importantly, the group should develop a homepage for the site that identifies the MMDA, its mission and its members, instead of promoting the group’s Fork and Cork Festival alone. The name of the organization – and not the event – should also be the banner name for the site (the name that shows up at the very top of the web browser). These changes are necessary to make sure the group has a strong identity.

The links area of the site should also be revamped to include links to the various stakeholder organizations, instead of links to members’ sites. Because those are shared on the “businesses” tab of the site, the current links section is redundant. In turn for linking to the various stakeholder groups, the MMDA should ask for the stakeholder groups to include a link to the MMDA site.

The “About Us” section of the site should be completed to include more details about the mission of the MMDA and the DREAM initiative. Also, links to the group’s Twitter and Facebook pages should be more prominently displayed on the site’s homepage.

Target Market:

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Also, new tabs could be added to the site to include information for Downtown business owners, either current or prospective. This information exists in pieces on other sites, and the MMDA site could build a reputation for being the key resource for that information.

The site could also include a blog authored by the new organization president informing readers about the group's current efforts in Downtown, including pictures of any on-going work or events. Blog posts could then be pushed out through Facebook and Twitter.

Strategy 1.5 - Create "Go-To" Outreach Materials

In order to have some quick information at their fingertips when advocating for Downtown Macon and its businesses, the MMDA should create some simple marketing materials, such as:

- **Fact Sheet** – A one-page, easy-to-read fact sheet outlining the goals of the MMDA, explaining how the organization works, the projects it has planned, its economic impact on the town (including job creation and new tax revenue) and its vision for the future.
- **Key Messages/Talking Points** – This document would include basic key messages, such as "The MMDA's mission is to revitalize Downtown Macon and bring a renewed enthusiasm to our residents." This key message would include "proof points" that would support that key message and show what the organization has done to support this goal. These key messages could be used by MMDA members and other Downtown advocates in presentations and casual conversations with relevant audiences, such as

elected officials, prospective donors and developers, residents and others.

- **Frequently Asked Questions** – This document would address issues that may arise during conversations, such as funding sources and amount of the current community investment, current plans and timelines. It would likely not be a public document, but would be shared with MMDA members as a way to communicate best with residents and visitors.
- **"What People Are Saying"** – This document would include testimonials from residents and business owners that demonstrate the benefits of a renewed Downtown.

Once these materials are created, they can be used again and again in the appropriate situations to advocate with various audiences about the MMDA, its mission and its accomplishments.

Strategy 1.6- Build Media and Social Media Networks

The majority of residents surveyed reported that they got most of their local news from the town newspaper. In conjunction with creating a blog for the MMDA president, the organization could approach the *Macon Chronicle Herald* about providing a regular, monthly column in the paper to update residents about its work and Downtown happenings. These types of columns regularly appear in community newspapers like the *Chronicle Herald* and are most likely only lightly edited by the newspaper staff. This is an excellent way for the MMDA to reach its target audience without going through the filter of a news reporter first to get its message across.

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The MMDA should also work to build relationships with reporters at the *Macon Chronicle Herald* and the *Kirkville Daily Express*. One tactic is to contact a few key reporters by phone and ask them to meet with MMDA members for coffee and an informal informational session. In this way, MMDA isn't only approaching reporters when it has an event to promote, but is instead presenting itself as a resource in the community. These meetings shouldn't take up more than 30 minutes of a reporter's time and could lead them to great story ideas about the MMDA and its mission.

The MMDA should also make better use of its social media channels to reach out to the community and its key stakeholders. The group should be "fans" and followers of all of the other stakeholder groups in town and make it a point to seek out and "friend" as many community leaders and journalists as possible. The MMDA should reach out and interact with these stakeholders through social media as much as possible by adding comments on their Facebook posts when appropriate and re-tweeting relevant news. Through its own Facebook page, MMDA should pose questions to its followers about what they would like to see the MMDA do next. Only through interaction in social media will the MMDA gain a strong following and have a truly unfiltered way to deliver its messages to, and receive feedback from, the community.



City of Macon website page.



Macon County Historical Society website page

OBJECTIVE 2: Expand Downtown Retail Sales and Encourage Business Investment

Once the MMDA has established itself in the community and has a solid foundation on which to build, its top priority should be to work with current and potential Downtown Macon business owners to generate sales and additional investment in the Downtown area. Now is time to establish Downtown Macon as a specialty shopping destination. The city has quality available storefronts for businesses looking to enter the market. By making information about available real estate and small business opportunities more easily accessible, Macon can make strides in attracting new retailers to Downtown.

Strategy 2.1 - Create a “Downtown Resource Hub”

The MMDA should find a partner, such as the Chamber of Commerce and/or Macon County Economic Development, to work together to invest in and create marketing materials specifically geared towards enticing potential business owners to invest in Downtown Macon. These materials could include tailoring some of the fact sheets, FAQs and other “go to” materials referenced in Objective 1 to cater specifically to the information a new business owner would need to know.

The gathering of this material could culminate in a “Downtown Resource Hub” set up on the MMDA website that would provide business owners and potential investors with a one-stop-shop of information about how to start a business Downtown. The site could build upon MCED’s current efforts both on and offline to create business opportunities in Macon County.

Once the hub is set up, the MMDA could promote it using its website and blog, as well as social media channels. It also should reach out to the local newspaper and TV station.

Strategy 2.2 - Host Marketing Training

As part of its efforts, the MMDA should create value-added resources for current Downtown business owners. One example is a marketing training event. Here, owners could share best practices with each other about how they best attract customers into their businesses. They could also brainstorm ideas for events they could do together to promote Downtown Macon. As a part of this gathering, the MMDA could share its marketing materials with the group and have an MMDA leader or even an outside marketing firm present to the business owners the importance of consistent marketing, messages and other communication tools. This could become a regular quarterly meeting of Downtown Macon business owners where they share ideas and tips.

Strategy 2.3 - Create a “Downtown Days”

To show off Downtown shops, bars and other businesses, the MMDA can bring everyone together for a weekend or weeklong “Downtown Days” event. It could include special demonstrations, discounts, food offerings and, of course, information about all that can be found Downtown.

To make it more enticing to residents and businesses, the event could feature a “passport” style system that encourages people to visit every exhibitor for the chance to win a prize. This would be different from the one-day Fork and Cork event because of the passport and the prize, as

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- Residents

well as the length of the promotion – but it could also tie into the Fork and Cork and be promoted during that event as the *NEXT* big event from the MMDA.

- **Conduct grassroots outreach in nearby communities.** Promote special events and shopping days in nearby communities.
 1. Consider having Macon-based retailers travel to those communities to offer “how to” demonstrations in a variety of crafts and skills. Then, they can invite participants to visit Macon.
 2. Hold specialty arts and crafts demonstrations in Macon, such as wine-making and/or wine-tasting events that draws visitors from nearby communities.

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The “Fork & Cork Festival” is held annually in August in Downtown Macon.

OBJECTIVE 3: Encourage Tourism in Downtown Macon

A vibrant tourism trade offers many potential benefits to a community. Tourism can help enhance the image of an area, increase local pride, and improve quality of life. As an industry, tourism is recognized as an important component of a diverse economy providing employment, redevelopment, and investment opportunity. All together, tourism can help to build a distinctive, unique, and productive community.

The economic benefits of tourism include job creation, as well as increased retail sales generation, essentially bringing new money into the community. The potential new retail sales from tourism can help to counter the changing nature of the retail environment, which has generally lead to a decline in sales tax revenues over the last few decades. While this effect is felt community-wide, it has had a particularly strong impact on many small downtowns. The attraction of new money to the community through tourism is an effective strategy to deal with the financial gap left by these trends as new money travels into and circulates throughout the community.

The positive effects of a successful tourism industry resonate through many business sectors, including non tourism-related businesses and the local community. The positive impacts will be felt by local businesses and residents alike. Local residents will benefit from added or improved visitor services and infrastructure, increased employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and improved shopping convenience and increased choice. A well balanced mix of retail, services, and recreation will make Downtown a destination, attractive to residents, visitors, and investors.

With little additional investment of capital or labor, Macon tourism could expand greatly to reach entirely new audiences, and the length of stay for current Macon visitors could be expanded to include overnight stays in the community.

To date, with the exception of minor attempts by the Chamber of Commerce, it does not appear that any organization has taken true ownership of the effort to attract more tourists to visit Macon. This represents an opportunity for the MMDA to become the destination for tourist information about the City and the Downtown, or at the very least, play a key role in the process with other groups such as the Chamber of Commerce taking the lead on the issue.

Strategy 5.1 - Assessment of existing framework . Development of a tourism enhancement strategy, just as any business or product development strategy, begins with an evaluation of the relationship between product and customer in a competitive marketplace. The analysis of these relationships results in the development or identification of a competitive advantage. A competitive advantage gives a community an edge over its rivals and an ability to generate greater success. The more sustainable the competitive advantage, the more difficult it is for competitors to neutralize the advantage. Competitors in this scenario are other communities that are attempting to attract in whole, or large part, the same target market.

- **Determine the Product.** For the purposes of this analysis the product is Downtown, its amenities and environ including: businesses, restaurants, museums, infrastructure, people, streets, sidewalks, parks, events, etc. Downtown is evaluated in terms of a

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- Residents
- Professionals
- Retirees
- School Groups
- Church Groups
- Cultural Tourists
- Food Tourists
- Cyclists
- Higher Income Shoppers
- Girlfriend Weekend Shoppers
- Mother/Daughter Shoppers

theme park or resort, striving to provide the same level of services. Downtown needs a balance of businesses and amenities that address, at a minimum, the basic needs of customers. A key to a successful product is maintaining focus on the primary product, service, or destination strengths, while at the same time adapting to changes and taking advantage of opportunities.

- **Determine the Customer.** The customer, in this evaluation, is the visitor or patron including residents of the community, neighboring areas, traditional tourists, etc. The community must understand who their customers are, who is currently visiting Downtown and why, as well as who they might be able to target and how. To understand and target customers, it is helpful to categorize visitors. A common categorization of visitors is by the reason for their visit:

Business Travelers—Most likely to travel during the week, driven by businesses, primarily basic needs of lodging, restaurants, services, gift shopping, and evening entertainment, potential to impress and return for pleasure.

Family Travelers—Most likely to travel during the weekend, driven by relatives, less likely to need lodging, potential needs of services and restaurants, general shopping.

Ethnic and Cultural Seekers—Looking for exposure to new experiences, development, and education. Interested in the area's "way of life" and people. Adventurous and looking for more than basic needs. Museums, galleries, concerts, festivals, and performances. Likely to shop for unique items.

Heritage and Passive Recreation Enthusiasts—This visitor enjoys the scenery and feel of the area more than the interaction with the people. They are more inwardly focused and reflective. Their needs are similar to the culture seeker, but are just as likely to enjoy a drive through town to look at architecture or a walk in the local parks.

Active Outdoor Adventurers—Intense enjoyers of the parks and natural areas. These sportsmen enjoy a wide variety and are not always young. Outdoorsmen, boaters, hikers, or golfers; they are on the move. They are devoted and spend money on their chosen sport.

Urban Entertainment—The shoppers, team sport spectators, college visitors, night owls, or amusement park attendees. They tend to travel in groups and have higher expendable incomes. Internet connectivity and cell phone access is important to them.

- **Market Positioning and Brand.** Once an understanding is reached on exactly what the product is and who the customers or target markets are, the focus turns to identifying the market positioning. An important component of a competitive advantage is a distinct market positioning and brand—something that draws on the strengths of the destination, its authenticity, and leverages customers' desire for unique experiences. It is essential to understand how customers currently perceive the destination, especially relative to competitors. This perception is the community's image or brand. The destination must craft a strategy that builds on the positive aspects of its current image and, if necessary, repositions it to a more advantageous and competitive position. Repositioning takes time, patience and per-

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sistence as it typically involves modifying previously held perceptions about your destination. Customers carry a preconceived idea of the destination's brand. The brand represents what people think of you—your image. The destination's brand is important as it is essentially a promise to provide a product or service in a consistent way.

Destination brands have four distinct components that make up brand image in the mind of the customer. Each component represents an opportunity to differentiate from competition and offer a unique consumer benefit. Destinations can reach their maximum potential by leveraging all four components. These include:

1. **Realm One—Place:** If you visit the Empire State Building, you go to a building with the city surrounding it. Up at the observation tower, the **place** becomes an oasis high above bustling Manhattan. What benefits does the place provide for the guest? Some people like the high energy feeling of being in the city, but they may also like taking a break from the intensity. People go to a destination. It exists in a physical place. A destination should try to get the most out of the power of its place.
2. **Realm Two—Experience:** Hike in the canyon. Ride the coaster. Attend a show. People want to do something at a destination—something unique, something to brag about, or something to share. The experience of a destination can provide key benefits to guests and a fundamental part of its brand. A destination can reach its full potential when it promotes the benefits of a unique experience and delivers.

3. **Realm Three—Mindset:** Sometimes a destination epitomizes or evokes an attitude, value, or mindset that has meaning beyond the physical limits of the site. Colonial Williamsburg set out to “own” the concept of Colonial America, and people might feel more patriotic just thinking about it. When a destination can symbolize an inspirational concept, it can form a powerful connection with its guests. The destination becomes a touchstone for the concept and people return to renew their connection with it.
4. **Realm Four—Organization:** What role does the organization behind the destination play in the brand? The Niagara Parks emblem conveys tremendous trust among regional guests who want to spend their money with the organization that helps preserve the nature and heritage of Niagara Falls. The organizational dimension of a destination may also make a big difference to future employees, donors, business partners, granting agencies, or other organizations. People want to associate with a cause or organization they feel good about, one that expresses their own values and aspirations.

When people think of your destination, do they long to be in the place, get excited by the experience, aspire to the values represented, and trust the organization behind it? When you can answer ‘yes’ to all four, people will attribute a high value to your destination brand. That value is your destinations’ competitive advantage, which relates directly to attendance and financial success.

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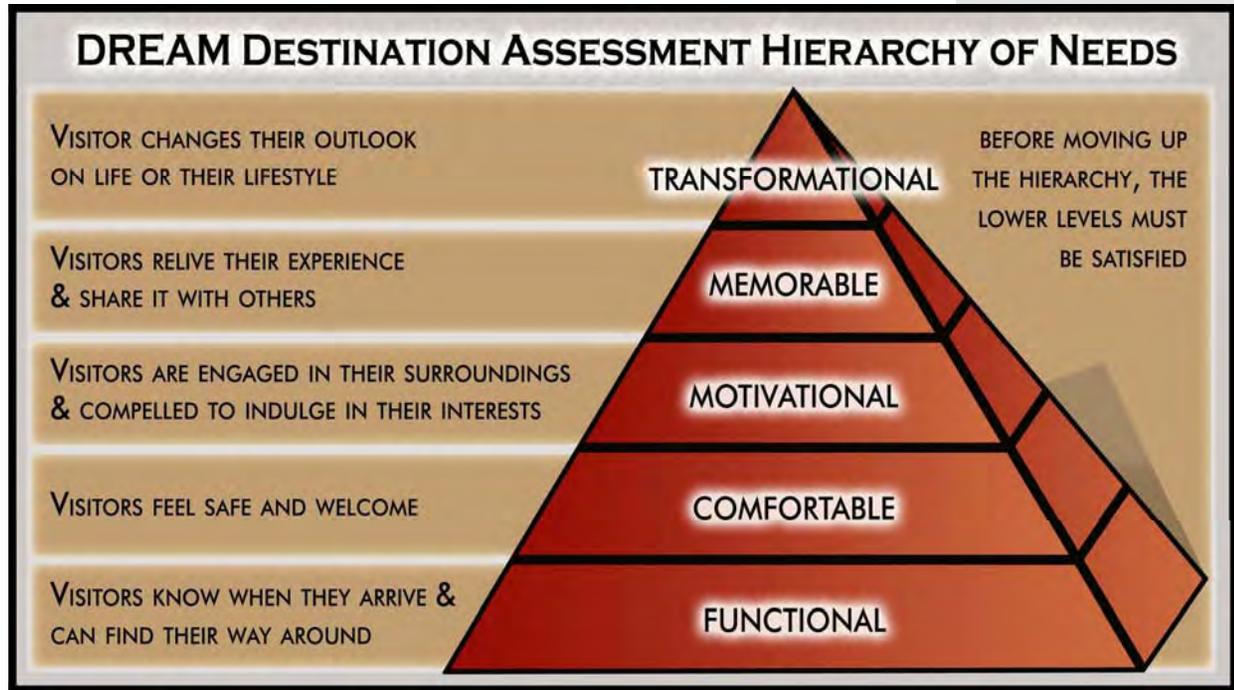
Strategy 5.2 - Establish the Hierarchy of Needs. Destinations and, in a larger sense, downtowns are basically customer-oriented businesses and therefore should always take the customer point-of-view. As stated earlier, when destinations conduct product development and determine marketing decisions they must address what the customer wants and needs.

PGAV Planners uses the concept of a destination consumer “Hierarchy of Needs,” which hypothesizes that customers must have their most basic needs met before they can attain higher levels of fulfillment. This customer-focused theme will recur throughout the recommendations for each community.

There are a great number of reasons or desires that drive an individual consumer’s decision to travel and their choice of destination. The “Hierarchy of Needs” describes the requirements a typical visitor has to have met in order for them to have a fulfilling destination experience. Questions a destination community may ask themselves regarding whether or not their community’s destination assets meet these needs are:

1. Functional: Does the City provide adequate wayfinding to make travel throughout the area easy and somewhat intuitive? Do visitors know when they have “arrived”? Does the City adequately provide basic comforts, such as parking, bathrooms, and a place to rest? Is information about destinations and events easily attainable?

- 2. Comfortable: Is the downtown pedestrian friendly and well lit? Are the building facades and streetscape designs aesthetically pleasing? Are numerous lodging and dining options present throughout the municipality? Does the downtown provide adequate comforts so that the visitor can relax and get away from home?
- 3. Motivational: Does the downtown provide visitors with activities in which to participate? What will move the visitor to get out of their car and get involved? Does the downtown provide a chance to learn, interact with others, and an opportunity for adventure or escape?



For the purposes of this Destination Assessment, PGAV uses the hierarchical scheme shown here, listed from bottom to top, to illustrate and describe the motivations of the typical, “Downtown” Missouri tourist.

4. **Memorable:** Does the downtown leave the visitor with positive memories? Do visitors repeatedly return to downtown? Do visitors recommend a visit to downtown to others? Is there positive word-of-mouth about downtown?
5. **Transformational:** If the City meets the aforementioned needs, then they've created a fulfilling experience to the visitor, which, hopefully, will positively change the visitor; thus imbuing the visitor with not only a valuable rejuvenative experience, but also a new and positive outlook on life. The visitor will want to return to and reconnect with the destination to renew that positive outlook in the future. The visitor will actively seek to bring others and share the rejuvenative experience.

In the case of a visit to a destination like a resort, zoo, or theme park, a single organization manages the tourist experience to ensure a "seamless" experience; one that flows smoothly and consistently from parking and restrooms to attractions, food and shopping without breaks in the "brand." People have come to expect this level of product and service. Destination communities would benefit from emulating this model to the degree they can considering the complexity of their destination environment (i.e. multiple tourism product owners and interests). For example, Destination communities can develop organizational structures that support a coordinated aesthetic presentation of downtown; manage a consistent and unified marketing plan; administer special event planning; and guide businesses towards consistent business standards (i.e. uniform business hours).

Strategy 5.3 - Improve Online Tourism Information. As a first step towards attracting visitors, the MMDA could create a special section on its website that promotes the various tourist attractions in Macon, and especially Downtown. Some of this information exists online sporadically on the City website, the County website and the Chamber of Commerce website, but it is hard to find, difficult to read and not self-contained or comprehensive.

The MMDA could partner with the City and Chamber of Commerce to improve these existing assets and house them within the chamber's website, with an emphasis on hunting and fishing opportunities, local events and theater. The MMDA could create a Downtown tourist attraction section on its own website and link to the rest of the information on the chamber's site.

Strategy 5.4 - Capitalize on Existing Residents and Visitors. Before considering paid advertising, contests or other promotions that carry a cost, the MMDA should use every available free option to promote Downtown and Downtown events, such as Downtown Days and Fork & Cork, to those in the Macon area who might already be interested in what's going on Downtown. This can be done by:

- **Earned media.** The MMDA can reach out to the media (Macon, Kirksville or even Columbia daily newspaper, the Macon CBS affiliate, etc.) to get placed in event calendars and schedule pre-event interviews for MMDA leaders to promote the event.
- **Flyers.** MMDA and its supporters can hand flyers to civic organizations, Downtown businesses and area schools for display and distribution in Macon and neighboring communities.
- **Outreach to niche audiences.** The MMDA should tap

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special audiences, such as fishermen and families who like to camp in the area, to encourage these people to schedule their visits to Long Branch State Park to coincide with Downtown events. MMDA can also work with area business and attractions to reach out to publications such as River Hills Traveler, Outdoor Guide Magazine and post to niche audience through groups like the Missouri Smallmouth Alliance.

- **Social media.** The MMDA can create a Twitter hash tag for each event, such as #ForkandCork.

Strategy 5.5 - Make Residents Rethink Downtown. Many residents surveyed reported that they visit Downtown only when they need to go to the post office or another government building. The MMDA should create some new promotion or event to encourage these residents to reconsider Downtown and give the shops, bars and other businesses there a second look. This could include Downtown Days, a community day of service Downtown, etc.

One idea would be for the MMDA to encourage the local Ben Franklin and J.P. stores to find local manufacturers, such as women who make arts and crafts and farmers who grow local produce, and market these products as “Made in Macon.” Because there are only two major retailers in Downtown Macon, and sometimes people bypass them for larger retailers in Columbia and Kirksville, this could be a unique way to encourage people to shop locally.

Another possibility would be to create a monthly event aimed just at current residents, not visitors. This event could be one where shops stay open later in the evening and host a special sale for City residents. To appeal to younger, perhaps newer residents, the MMDA could

sponsor and arrange a “Downtown Macon Bar Crawl,” in which local bars would offer special promotions to residents.

In addition to small events for specialty groups there are other activities that could appeal to the masses and attract a diverse range of new tourists. Playing on Macon’s name, a “Macon Bacon” festival is sure to attract eating enthusiasts from Columbia, St. Louis, Kansas City and beyond. At the very least it will definitely get Macon’s name out there.

Strategy 5.6 - Use Existing Assets to Draw New Visitors. Macon is at the crossroads of Highways 63 and 36 and a part of America’s “Highway of Genius” between Hannibal and St. Joseph. One way to capitalize on this would be for the MMDA to partner with the Highway 36 Heritage Alliance and its sample itineraries to promote Downtown Macon as a great place to stop along Highway 36 for a meal, a glass of wine or shopping. The group has been working to reach out to travel writers and others about the newly expanded Highway, so it would likely welcome the partnership (and the opportunity to have a link on MMDA’s website). The Highway of Genius logos could also be incorporated on the MMDA website and other materials, such as flyers and fact sheets.

Of course, one of the best ways for Macon to attract new visitors is through paid advertising and social media promotions. Recognizing that MMDA has limited resources, one way to spread the word to new people without spending a lot is by investing in search advertising.

Google and Facebook ads are highly efficient – only charging when someone clicks on the ad – and they can

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be micro-targeted down to the specific zip code where the search is made. So, if someone in Columbia searches for “festival,” Google could deliver an ad that says, “Come to the Fork and Cork Festival in Macon.” Please note: Ad cost varies based on the uniqueness and desirability of the search term. For example, the generic “ice cream” costs more than “Baskin-Robbins.” The first steps are:

- Determine which search terms are most relevant to purchase using this site: www.google.com/ads/adwords.
- If possible, work in partnership with Downtown retailers to pay for advertising to expand saturation and reach.
- Start small and examine the metrics. Both Google and Facebook provide ad buyers measurable insights on ad usage. Evaluate the results, and modify the ad buy accordingly in order to maximize efficacy.
- Use zip codes to reach out specifically to Columbia, Kirksville and Moberly residents.

Another way to draw traffic to Macon’s Downtown would be to reach out to the niche audiences of Missouri theater fans and wine enthusiasts. Most of the people in the Downtown “on the street” survey said they were in Downtown that day to visit West Winery.

The MMDA could reach out to the *Columbia Daily Tribune* and *Columbia Missourian* weekly entertainment publications to pitch a story about the little-known Macon winery as a great place to visit. The MMDA could work with the Maples Repertory Theater to pitch a story to the Columbia

and Kirksville newspapers about a special spot in Central Missouri where actors gather to perform and live every summer. This is the kind of “small town life” feature story reporters love.

Coordinate with the Missouri Division of Tourism. Currently, there is little listed on visitmo.com/Macon. There is no description of the city, related articles or coupons. The only events listed are the next six productions at the City of Maples Repertory Theatre. In addition to getting more information published on the main state tourism site, Macon representatives should provide talking points and fact sheets to the agency to better equip its staff to talk about Macon tourism.

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CONCLUSION

To feel invested in the future of their City and Downtown, Macon residents need to have a strong understanding of what Downtown is – its past, its present and vision for the future. If residents are allowed to dream a little, and are shown how a revitalized Downtown would have direct benefits to them, it will be easier to get them interested, invested and active as volunteers.

The MMDA needs a structured way to secure donors and build a community of supporters. It also needs to rely heavily on other organizations in Macon, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to integrate Downtown priorities into existing efforts to boost the community.

As a first step, the MMDA should, within its renewed leadership structure, create a few core communications pieces – some fact sheets, key messages and talking points, frequently asked questions, additional social media content and testimonials from residents and business owners that demonstrate the benefits of a renewed Downtown. Other items, such as website renovations, can wait until MMDA has a stronger volunteer, paid staffing, and funding structure in place.

The most important next steps will be to reach out to local business owners to start bridging communications and integrating efforts with other interested parties to make the most out of Macon, its assets and its opportunities.

By forming regional coalitions, syncing more closely with state agencies and being more aggressive with media outreach, the City will be able to reinforce and strengthen its reputation in the region and the state. However, to

impact long-term investment in Downtown, more communications need to be targeted directly at the business community. With strong support and cooperation from the City and the Chamber, MMDA can drive Downtown Macon to become even more attractive for both business and tourism.

Only after these relationships are established will it make sense to reach out to tourists and invest in efforts to attract them to the Downtown. When ready, there are several ideas, including creating some new Downtown events, that will help in that effort.

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APPENDIX

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SWOT Analysis

A SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis is a highly effective way of identifying Strengths and Weaknesses (of existing conditions) and the Opportunities and Threats (of future conditions) which may be present or emerge within any given community. Carrying out this type of analysis will assist an entity in capitalizing on its strengths and opportunities and on focusing needed attention on those areas requiring improvement.

The sponsors of the DREAM Initiative have long recognized the benefits that can be derived from a community's willingness to identify and address features, both physical and psychological, that may hinder its progress. As part of the analysis process that was conducted for Downtown Macon, the consultants and local leaders facilitated a series of Focus Group Meetings with representative groups from the Downtown community; interviews with Downtown Macon business owners; user surveys of area residents and out-of-town visitors; and conducted on-site visits of Downtown.

The summary of the analysis is listed on the following pages as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Downtown Macon.

Downtown Macon SWOT Analysis:

The DREAM Initiative has facilitated Focus Groups Meetings, business owner interviews, and on-site visits. The summary of the SWOT Analysis is listed below:

Strengths

- Concentration of civic institutions brings people to Downtown (Courthouse, City Hall, library, churches, etc.)
- The Maples Repertory Theatre is a regional draw for Downtown.
- ConAgra's plant provides an ample supply of employees for restaurant and store patronage.
- Businesses which are regional shopping destinations.
- Unique retail shops.
- Smart and successful business owners.
- The Chamber of Commerce has a variety of excellent visitors' guides, brochures and marketing materials related to Downtown Macon and the City of Macon.
- City and county governments are located in Downtown.
- Professional class interested in sustainability of Downtown.

Weaknesses

- Poor lighting at night creates negative image.
- The lack of a paid director for Downtown Association (MMDA).
- Downtown Macon overall has some major infrastructure needs and lacks a cohesive aesthetic identity.
- Many buildings have been modified so as to lack architectural character.
- Wayfinding to Downtown Macon, from Highway 63 is virtually non-existent.
- Amount of service and office users versus retail and restaurants.
- There are a number of vacant lots which are visible and scattered throughout the Downtown.
- There is a perception of Downtown Macon as being unsafe at night.
- Volunteer efforts are too often left to the same small number of people.

Opportunities

- With increased volunteerism there is room for more special events and projects in the Downtown.
- There is a chance to create cohesive streetscape and wayfinding systems to establish a consistent look and feel for Downtown Macon.
- Feed off of the Theatre patrons in Downtown Macon.
- Upgrade of infrastructure and continued beautification of Downtown Macon will be a priority.
- The wayfinding and signage systems can improve.
- There can be increased community advertising and marketing opportunities.
- Downtown Macon can build upon its existing niche shopping experience and atmosphere.
- A Facade Incentive Program can enhance the aesthetic qualities and experiences of Downtown.
- Development of a plaza and event space could be a new icon for Downtown and the City.
- Strengthening the Downtown organization: Mainstreet Macon Downtown Association (MMDA)

Threats

- Residents will continue to shop for specialty items at newer retail developments outside of Downtown.
- Lack of funding source directly related to Downtown infrastructure improvements.
- Difficulty redeveloping Downtown buildings will persist.
- Lack of capital in rehabilitation of downtown buildings.
- Concentration of low-rent housing in and around Downtown.
- Perception of security problem.
- Property owners who neglect to maintain their properties.
- Local events and festivals not held in Downtown Macon.
- Apathy and a general lack of volunteers to help achieve revitalization efforts.

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