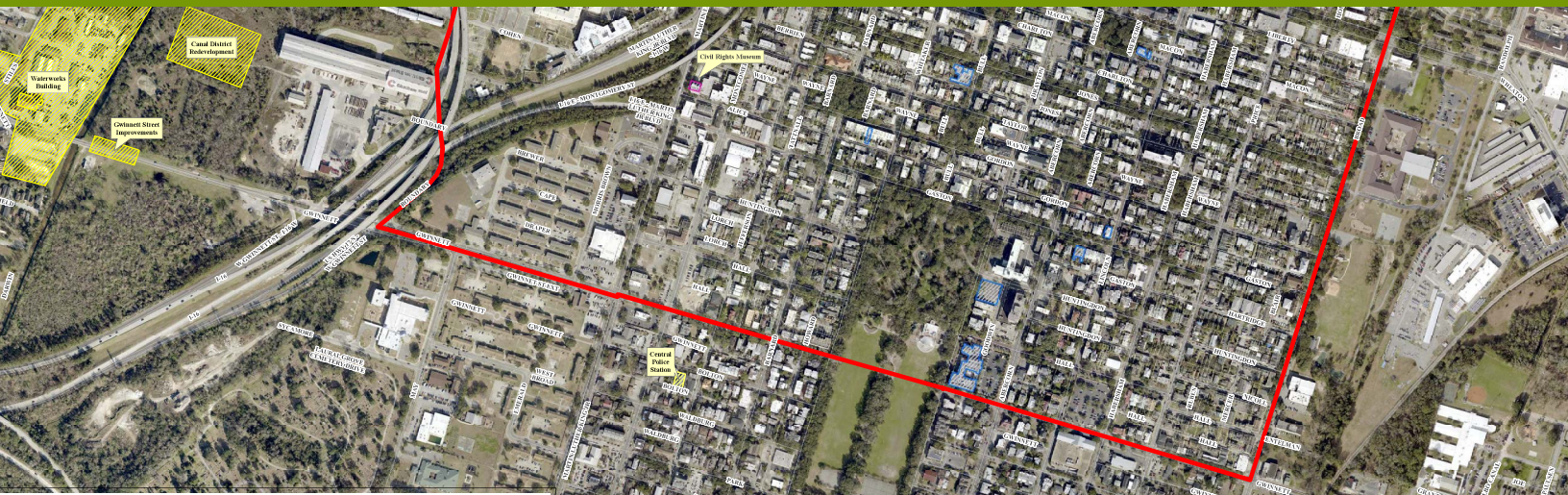




Savannah Civic Center Redevelopment



**Urban Land
Institute**
Atlanta

An Urban Land Institute
Technical Assistance Panel
October 29-30, 2018

“Tourism is about more than marketing. It is also about protecting and enhancing the product communities are trying to promote. Citizens, elected officials, and developers alike can take a leadership role in creating a sustainable tourism agenda that will strengthen the American economy and at the same time preserve the natural and cultural assets that make the United States unique.”

– from “[Ten Principles for Responsible Tourism](#),” by Edward T. McMahon in *Urban Land* magazine, published online Aug. 10, 2015.

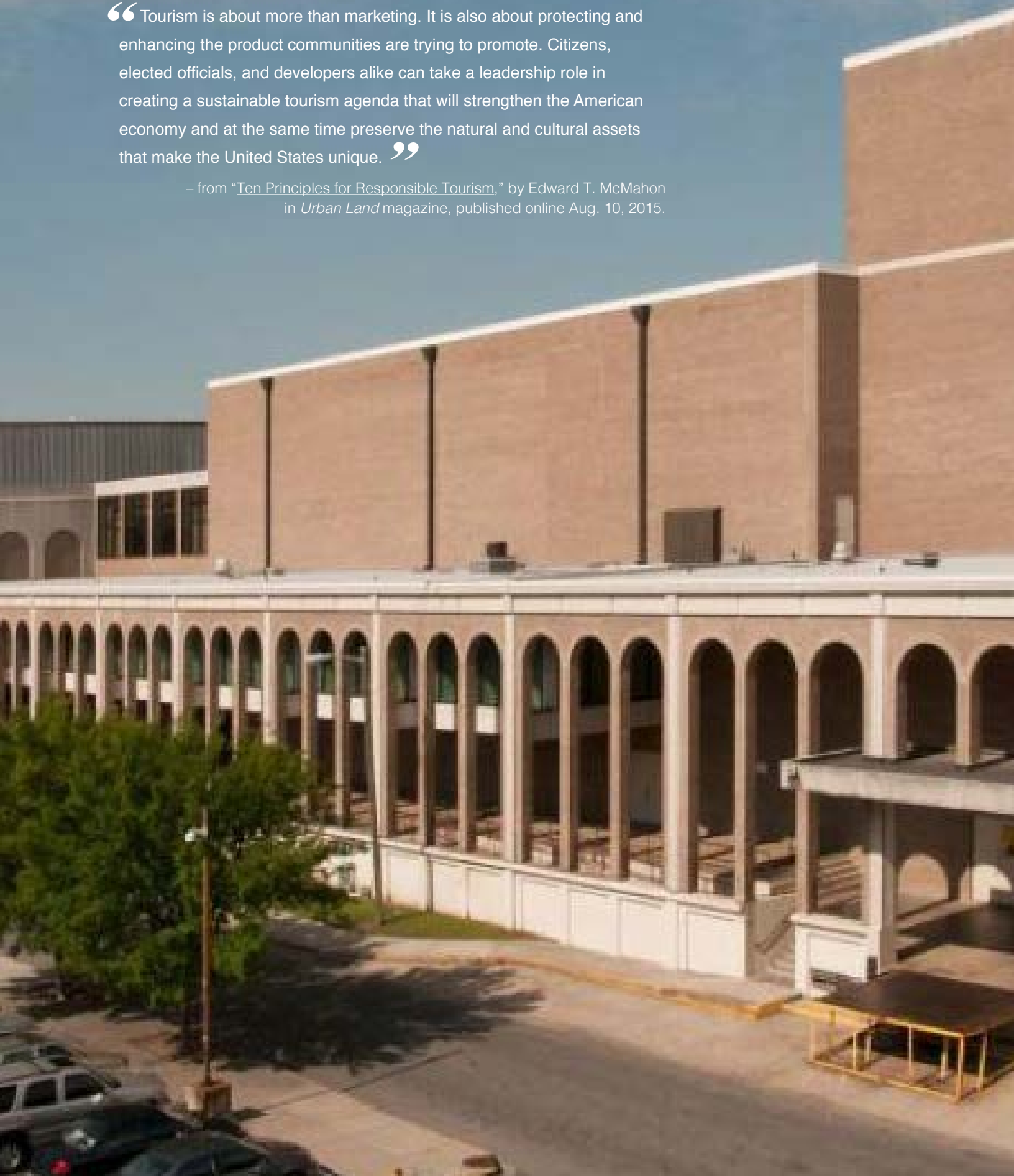




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ABOUT ULI – URBAN LAND INSTITUTE

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, The Urban Land Institute (ULI) is a non-profit education and research group supported by its diverse, expert membership base. Our mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI ATLANTA

With over 1,300 members throughout the Atlanta region (Georgia, Alabama & Eastern Tennessee), ULI Atlanta is one of the largest and most active ULI District Councils worldwide. We bring together leaders from across the fields of real estate and land use policy to exchange best practices and serve community needs. We share knowledge through education, applied research, publishing, electronic media, events and programs.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)

Since 1947, the Urban Land Institute has harnessed the technical expertise of its members to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the Atlanta Region. Drawing from our seasoned professional membership base, ULI Atlanta offers objective and responsible guidance on a variety of land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions.

The sponsoring organization is responsible for gathering the background information necessary to understand the project and presenting it to the panel. TAP members typically spend two days developing an understanding of the problem, coming up with recommendations, and presenting those findings and recommendations to the sponsoring organization.



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TAP Panelists

Introduction: The Panel's Assignment

Scope of Project

The City of Savannah asked ULI Atlanta to convene a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) to consider the highest and best uses of the City of Savannah's Civic Center Site [hereafter, "the site"]. The site "represents a unique and significant redevelopment opportunity within Savannah's National Landmark Historic District [hereafter, Historic District]. The City's goal is to realize the highest and best use [of this site] within the context of respecting the Oglethorpe Plan, reconnecting neighborhoods, and determining compatible mixed-use redevelopment opportunities. The TAP's recommendations on future plans and redevelopment strategies should recognize the historic aspects of the site and consider the new catalytic developments in close proximity to the site." (From advanced briefing materials.)

The Study Area

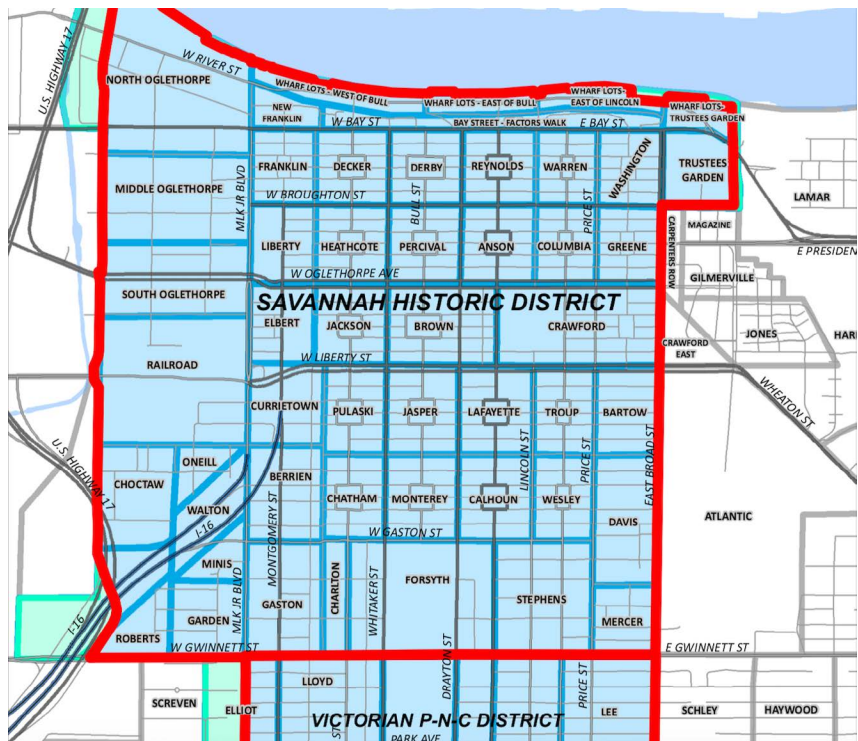
The primary focus of the TAP study was the site of the publicly-owned City of Savannah Civic Center, which was built in 1972 and houses the 9,700-seat Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Arena, the 2,500-seat Johnny Mercer Theatre, a ballroom, several multi-purpose rooms used for a number of municipal and community purposes, and two levels of expansive lobby space. The property also includes a 275-space surface parking lot.

The site encompasses approximately 7.0 acres, or the equivalent of 10 city blocks, and is situated on the far west edge of Savannah's downtown and within the Historic District between West Oglethorpe Avenue to the north, Montgomery Street to the west, West Liberty Street to the south and Barnard Street to the east. The construction of the site was an integral part of an urban renewal initiative in the 1970s, wherein exceptions were made to the Oglethorpe Plan. Additionally, the Historic District Ordinance was not yet in place, allowing the Civic Center complex to claim parts of two of the City's original wards,

Elbert and Jackson, while also claiming a large part of Elbert Square. This disrupted original street patterns and closed off traffic to the rest of the Historic District to the east.

A secondary focus of the TAP included two proposed sites west of MLK Jr. Blvd: the new Arena site and the area west of West Boundary Street, slated to be developed as the Canal District. These sites are relevant to any long-term plans for the original Civic Center, in that they represent potential for economic development. However, suggestions for their use and composition were not part of the TAP's original mandate. The panel was simply charged with taking these projects into consideration as they explored the highest and best use for the Civic Center site.

The panel was also asked to consider the steady growth of one of the area's biggest landowners and population centers, the Savannah College of Art and Design, at the edge of the Historic District. The projected 2019 opening of the Savannah Cultural Arts Center was also a subject of review for the TAP, as this 39,000-square-foot facility sits directly across from Montgomery Street from the Civic Center, fronting Montgomery Street. This facility will have a 464-seat theatre with a fixed stage, a smaller performance space for 100 seats, five studio classrooms and a gallery space.

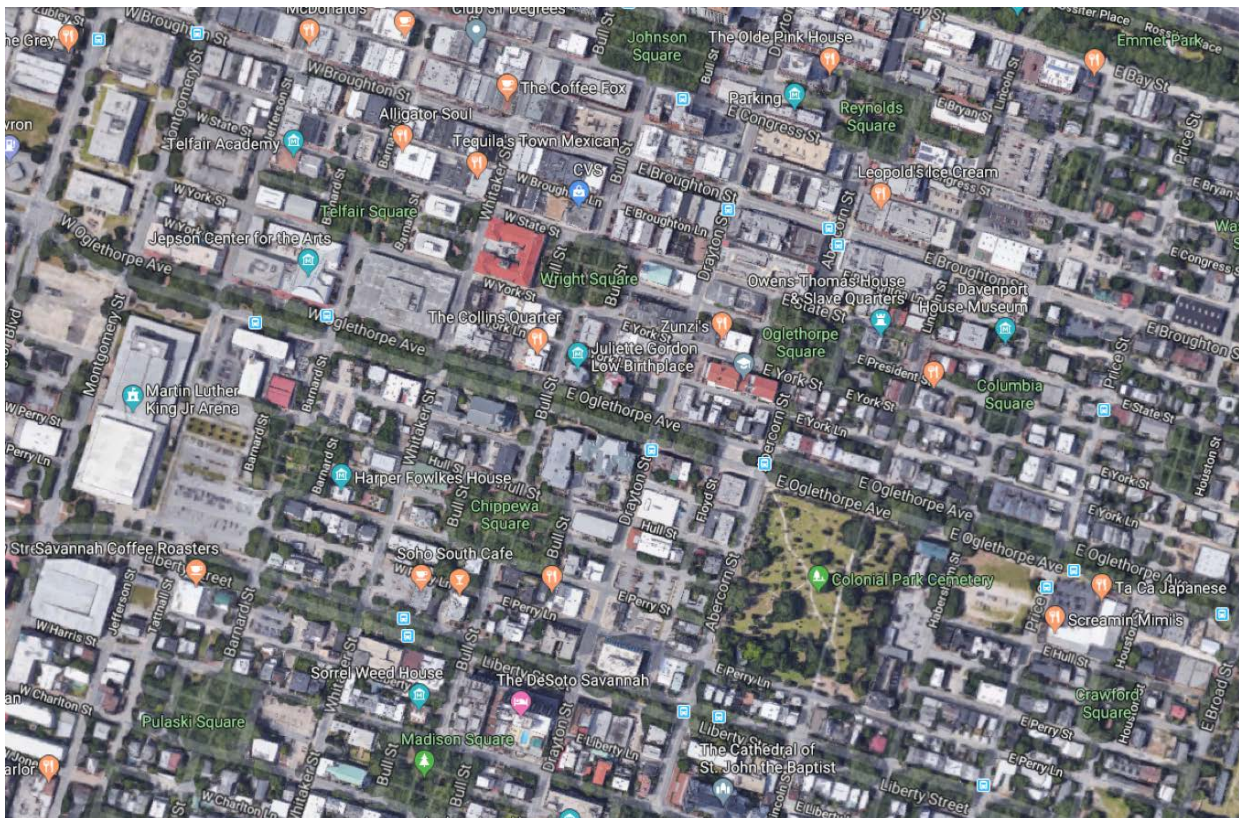


Boundaries for the Savannah Historic District

Questions for the Panel

The City engaged the ULI TAP to address the following questions:

1. What is the best use of this property that respects the integrity of Savannah's National Landmark Historic District, as well as celebrates and promotes our cultural assets including the Oglethorpe Plan, the urban forest, the architectural landscape, and a diverse community?
2. How can the City best leverage this property to have a catalytic economic impact on downtown while respecting the character of the surrounding neighborhood(s) and serving as a partner in community building?
3. What type of partnership structures (public/private, joint venture, sale/lease, City as developer, etc.) would best support the successful redevelopment of the site?
4. What opportunities are possible for the site to serve as a gateway to the National Landmark Historic District and to connect to the developing Canal District?



A Google Earth satellite image showing the Civic Center site in the context of the Historic District and the many squares.

The TAP Process

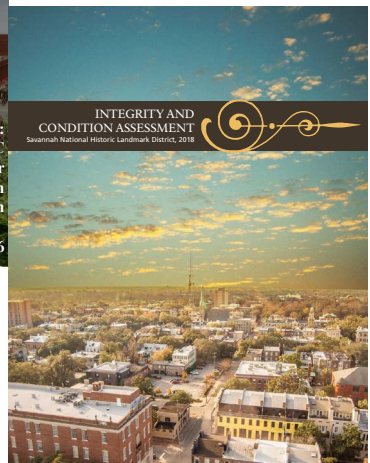
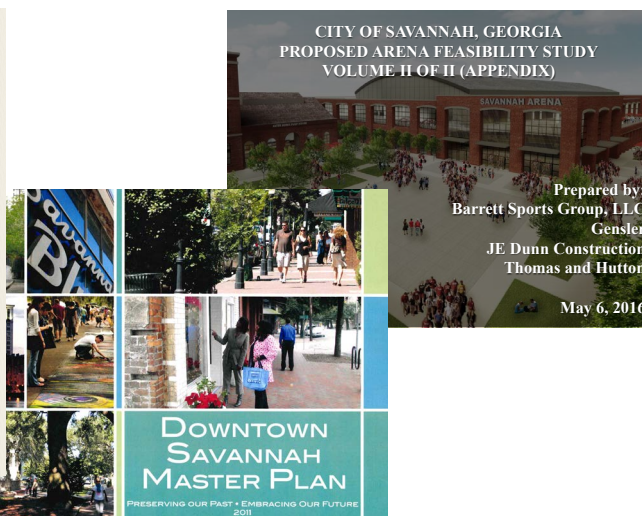
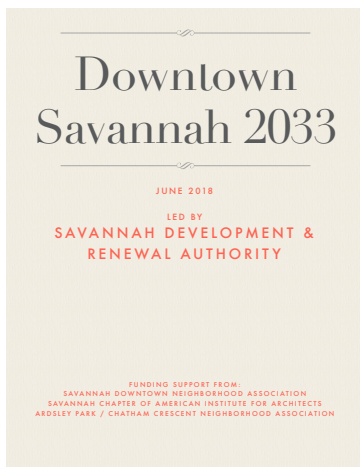
Prior to the TAP, the TAP Committee worked with the City of Savannah in September 2018 to give advice on a community engagement survey that was an important part of the stakeholder engagement process.

The survey was released by the City of Savannah on September 28, 2018 and remained open until October 12, 2018. In total, the City received over 500 responses to this online, seven-question survey, designed to solicit feedback from the public about the highest and best use of the Civic Center site. Below is a brief summary of the results:

- A majority of respondents (53.92%) said preserving Savannah's National Landmark Historic District and the Oglethorpe Plan was their "highest priority."
- Respondents cited their "top three preferences" for use of the Civic Center site would be:
 1. more greenspace/park/civic space (81.18%);
 2. more arts/cultural/entertainment spaces (73.73%); and
 3. a mixed-use – residential, office, commercial and retail – space (51.76%).
- Less than half of respondents (39.80%) think it's "very important" for the City to maintain a civic space, or some kind of venue, for these community uses.
- Two-thirds of respondents (66.67%) use the Civic Center site for "entertainment" purposes.
- Respondents have mixed feelings about whether the City should continue to offer a venue for these kinds of services: 29.41% think it's "not important"; 28.04% think it's "very important"; others are split between thinking it's "important" (24.31%) and "somewhat important" (18.24%).
- Nearly one-half of respondents (47.84%) said these services could be offered elsewhere, as long as they are kept downtown.
- Roughly three-quarters of respondents (75.29%) live within the City of Savannah limits.

At a pre-panel working session held on Friday, October 19, the panelists reviewed the survey results, as well as additional reports and opinions on the Civic Center site. Those included:

- *City of Savannah Arena Advisory Committee*
 - Majority recommendations: Johnny Mercer Theatre, ballroom and meeting rooms should be retained.
 - Minority position: Civic Center building removed; City sells land for residential and commercial use; use proceeds to preserve Johnny Mercer Theatre.
- *Downtown Savannah 2033*, June 2018
- *Savannah Civic Center Site: A Brief History* (presentation by staff of City of Savannah Municipal Archives on Day One of the TAP)
- *Downtown Savannah Master Plan*, 2011
- *Downtown MLK Arena Tech Package*, August 2018
- *Barrett Report, Proposed Arena Feasibility Study (Volumes I & II)*, 2016
- *Savannah National Historic Landmark District Assessment*, 2018



Day One - October 29, 2018



A tour of the study area provided additional context for the TAP panelists

Sponsor Presentation

On Monday, October 29, the ULI panelists assembled in the Simms Room on the second floor of the Savannah Civic Center at 301 W. Oglethorpe Avenue for a presentation by the City of Savannah (also referred to herein as “the City,” and “the Client”). Leading the session was the City’s Strategic Initiatives Manager, Liz Taschereau. She, along with Director of Municipal Archives & Records Management for the City and its acting Clerk of Council, Luciana Spracher, walked the panel through the relevant research contained in the advance briefing materials.

They reiterated the panel’s scope of work, gave an overview of past, present and proposed development strategies, and introduced other key members of City leadership. These leaders provided background on a range of topics, including local planning initiatives, sustainability, business development, the local real estate and housing market, and management of the Civic Center, MLK Arena and the Johnny Mercer Theatre. The Client then opened up the discussion for questions from panelists.

Tour of Study Area and Relevant Locations

Acting Director of the Civic Center property Justin Strickland led the panel on a walking tour of the site, which included the other meeting spaces, the 3rd floor ballroom, the MLK Arena, the Johnny Mercer Theatre, and the surface parking lot outside. The group then boarded a trolley for a tour led by Manny Dominguez, the City’s Director of

Business Opportunity, who pointed out areas of interest adjacent to the Study Area: Elbert Square; the Savannah Visitor’s Center; and key sites along Louisville, Stiles and Gwinnett Streets.

The tour stopped at the site of the proposed Canal District for an update on development plans there, before continuing west toward the site of the new Arena complex. The tour moved to the historic Waterworks building for a presentation by the City’s Director of Arena Development, Pete Shonka, on development plans that included not only the new Arena, but also a municipal complex and other mixed uses designed to stimulate economic activity in the area.

At the panel’s request, the tour included a drive through some of the historic residential neighborhoods adjacent to the proposed Arena site, including Historic Carver Village and Kayton-Frazier. The tour then headed back toward downtown and the Civic Center, with Mr. Dominguez and Ms. Spracher pointing out key historic sites and municipal development opportunities along the way via Gwinnett, Montgomery, Congress, Barnard and Liberty Streets.

Stakeholder Interviews

After a working lunch, wherein panelists met privately to share observations, the group split into smaller groups to meet with invited stakeholders representing a wide range of interests and perspectives. A summary of those interviews follows in this report.

Following the official stakeholder interviews, the panel met with Marty Johnston, the City’s Chief Operating Officer responsible for overseeing the Civic Center operations, the MLK Arena and the Johnny Mercer Theatre. Ms. Johnston’s observations are included in the “Key Issues” section.

Panel Deliberations and Working Dinner

Following the stakeholder sessions, the panel had an opportunity to regroup for more observations and to ask questions of the Client. The panelists, accompanied by Ms. Taschereau and Ms. Spracher, adjourned to walk to a working dinner. The group was joined by Savannah Mayor Eddie DeLoach and City Manager Rob Hernandez, each of whom had a chance to share his perspective on the development challenges and opportunities presented for the Study Area.

Day Two - October 30, 2018

The following morning, Tuesday, October 30, the panel reconvened in the Simms Room of the Civic Center for a working session, wherein they revisited the Scope of Work of the assignment, reported their respective findings from the previous day's stakeholder sessions, and began its deliberations around the key questions for consideration. While the City staff members were onsite to answer any questions and to provide requested information, ULI panelists spent the majority of the day meeting in private to prepare its preliminary report.

Presentation

At 4:15 p.m., in the Civic Center ballroom, the ULI panelists presented an overview of its findings and recommendations in an open session to the Client. City staff members who had been part of the two-day TAP were present, as well as Mayor DeLoach, City Manager Hernandez, several City council members, many of the previous day's stakeholder session participants, members of the media, and the public. After a 45-minute presentation, panelists took questions and comments from the audience.

Note: As part of the opening slides of the presentation, the City of Savannah thanked the following Community Partners for their sponsorship support:

- Downtown Neighborhood Association
- Historic Savannah Foundation
- Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce
- Savannah Downtown Business Association
- Old Savannah Tours

Report Preparation and Release

This TAP report was prepared under the leadership of ULI Atlanta and offers a summary of the activities that took place during the program, as well as a more detailed exploration of key findings and panel recommendations that were presented onsite on October 30.

Stakeholders

The ULI panelists would like to thank the stakeholders who participated in the onsite interview sessions. Their valuable insights played an important role in the panel's deliberations as it worked through some of the key challenges outlined in the assignment.

A summary of unattributed comments, derived from three sets of concurrent sessions, are below. Please note that each session included a range of voices and opinions. Every effort was made to include the variety of perspectives shared. A full list of participants by subject matter and session, is available by contacting the City Manager's office.

Onsite Interviews of Stakeholders - Summary of Comments:

Disclaimer: Please note these reflect stakeholder comments (in some cases verbatim) during the breakout sessions and they are the opinions of people participating in those sessions.

- **TOURISM** – Would not like to see surface parking or a developed site just for profit, notably a hotel. Many people live downtown, though it's less diverse than other areas. Fourteen million visitors annually come to Savannah; less than half of those are considered "marketable." Whatever happens on this site, should have a civic space, some kind of node to capture people coming from downtown; must maintain historic character of the area. Mercer Theatre is problematic; the acoustics are bad and there's deferred maintenance. If looking at mixed use, do something that helps the community and has ROI, which is likely tourism- and parking-related. Or, something high-end residential, with rooftop pool, gym, etc. People don't want to park far away and have to walk, due to crime concerns and a need for easy access. This site is a unique opportunity to see something large-scale, with greater capital investment from groups we haven't seen before.
- **REALTORS & APPRAISERS** – Would like to see Class A development here; there's a "wall" created at MLK. Would be in favor of the grid restoration; more balance on this side of town for the eastern Wharf project. Mixed-use development would be good; not in favor of using this as a shuttle space. Ideal housing spot for young professionals, maybe short-term rentals good here could be explored. There are concerns about bureaucracy, political tensions like anywhere else, and recent controversies related to fire fee and the revisions to the short-term vacation rental (STVR). These regulations put a 20% cap on residentially zoned parcels, thereby driving up the prices of homes. Churches here are very powerful. This site is A+ land, will garner top-market prices. A 3BR townhome is in

the \$750-900K range. Think you could get class A prices here; there's a lot of B-/C-class office space. Parking issue would be a factor, because every unit would ideally have one internal space, one street permitted.

- **ARTS & CULTURE** – Let's grow the creative economy; there are few jobs for SCAD grads to transition into. Would like to see a flex-space, but with creative arts administrator to make sure it thrives; currently, there are few affordable housing options, would like to see that addressed. Also need to remain sensitive to who and what events would be displaced. Makes financial sense to tear down, replace with mixed-use development to serve larger community and growing student population of 4K in school year, 1.5K in summer. Would like to see grocery, but no bars or nightclubs. There's a need for workforce and affordable housing; re-establishing the grid would be ideal. Mercer has great history, ambiance, but it has challenges, in terms of acoustics, logistics (risers, load-in) and size. Philharmonic opts for the Lucas over Mercer for these reasons. Can sell out Mercer for youth concerts, holiday concerts or summer POPs but not many other times. Parking, safety, accessibility, walking proximity to restaurants, post-concert entertainment options are all key issues. Would like to see City explore idea to build a new theatre on the east side (mid-town). Not all are enthusiastic about the proposed Canal District. Creative class wants to live in the city; keep downtown viable by recruiting talent to live here.
- **BUSINESS** – Consider Civic Center as an asset for economic development. Note that there's frustration and conversation fatigue in the business community about state of these properties; many feel that nothing is going to be done. Ideally, bring in some private influences to offset city-run process. Perception is a concern: why are we building the new Arena, talking about a new performing arts center, when we don't know the future of this site? Market is too small to bring in naming rights or sponsorships. We've had a lot of interest with the TSPLOST list, though credibility with the public and the huge cost overruns make things difficult. Business community favors downtown restoration and a desire to see site back on tax rolls. The future of the \$62M flyover has a big impact on what happens on this site; that project separated parts of town and impacted the TSPLOST. Would be great to do a TAD on this block. Mercer-type theatre could be built anywhere. If this was opened up to private investment groups, you'd have a lot of interest. Predict these investors would opt to keep the square, build retail, mixed use, and a continuation of downtown. This site could help some neighborhoods stimulate economic development. Could look at the 5th floor bonus (on the 4-story max code), but would have to conform to criteria: active use on ground floor; green roof; high quality materials; and affordable housing.
- **BUILDINGS** – Subterranean parking lots have been a win for the City (one project lost 500 surface lots, gained 1,000 underground); and these should be considered. Citizens need opportunity to build things with character; not just the plan dictated from "above" – it's the street-level experience that makes it special. It's already a catalyzed piece of property, with a steady stream of pedestrians and traffic. The Civic Center is in the way. The best part of Savannah is its "granularity," where the private/public distinction is maintained. People need to be educated about parking options; need less discussion about how to accommodate people from far away that come just once a year. Like the idea of this being a cultural center with the theatre; then again, the theatre can go anywhere downtown. Connectivity to other parts of Savannah is key; this area can serve as a kind of "connective tissue" to stimulate surrounding growth. Need to define and put some code in place to encourage affordable housing; not enough focus on this. Development needs to be an equalizer. Downtown is losing population, need a draw for residents. Need to break the cycle of City selling to highest bidder, then developers developing (w/little regard to aesthetics) so that they can get the highest ROI as fast as possible.
- **PRESERVATION & GREENSPACES** – Mercer Theatre outdated; surface parking not best use. Why not revert back to Oglethorpe Plan and start over? Getting back to this, reinstatement of the squares, streets and lanes, would have public support and mitigate the concerns about our (historic) landmark status. This kind of preservation is what we're here to protect. Waterfront park was a missed opportunity: we need to get this right, it needs to be spectacular. Fears that this site could go by way of the French Quarter and go back to entertainment-only. Labor shortage is an

issue because of lack of affordable housing. Bring back residential. More about the look and feel of the space, the character, than what actually goes there.

- **MUSEUM & EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES** – Would support any plan that would make healthy choices easy for residents and visitors, e.g., not a food truck lot. Hope we don’t turn it into something that’s out of scale that we don’t want. Living wage considerations in the area and access to a civic space are important. Let’s look at the grid patterning and be as inclusive as we can be in whatever plan we pursue. We don’t need high-end retail here, but we do need affordable housing options. If this building was removed, many civic uses would be missed – there’s good transportation access here, so would want to be sure that was offered elsewhere.
- **NEIGHBORHOOD** – The Association’s input has been formally shared in a written position paper. Restore the grid – including lanes – to respect the historic location and improve walkability to and around the site; streets to come back for the sale of individual lots for individual homes. The downtown master plans should be consulted. More affordable housing could be considered, but no hotels. The Mercer Theatre could go away, not considered a draw. Parking not really an issue at this location, although other downtown locations do need more parking. Need grocery store (only 1 downtown and it is on east side); need neighborhood-supported retail (hardware store, grocery store, etc.).
- **CITY COUNCIL** – Confirming that the Arena deal is done; convinced it would stimulate growth to the west. Traffic not having to come through Historic District would be good; send them near I-16 to new Arena. When MLK Arena isn’t in use, it’s a good spot for shuttling people in. There was skepticism about people coming in last-minute with plans for the site, given its history and the ongoing conversations about its fate. Stormwater mitigation coming off the bluff would be a concern, but having this much land close to the urban core is a huge opportunity. Priority should be to engage the private sector vs. pursuing govt.-led business incubators. Some feel the deferred maintenance of the Mercer Theatre would make it too expensive to preserve and that public would agree; others say there’s a real nostalgia for this Civic Center – the performances, graduations, life events that people have always come to in the

community. Can’t replace that feeling of excitement about coming downtown to go the theatre; it was a big deal and many people’s only occasion to come to this part of town. While the new Arena could provide a place for some of these community events, we must acknowledge a sense of loss if the site is razed. That said, given the financial constraints and the realities of the new Arena building costs, there are compelling reasons to raze and sell and establish new civic meeting spaces. No hotels should be pursued; mixed use would be better. Once this site is razed, developers will come to us so there shouldn’t be any worries about interest. “Downtowns should be for everyone, even those who don’t live downtown.”

- **ARENA COMMITTEE** – Despite earlier reservations about eliminating the MLK Arena, the consensus of the committee now is that the MLK Arena should be removed due to insurmountable costs to preserve and maintain building. There is also a “missing middle” problem, meaning there’s no place to live for workforce, college grads. This site may be worth \$16-23 million, and we should get it back on the tax rolls. There should be a study conducted to see if it’s fiscally feasible to preserve theatre; if not, it should go. Would be good to re-establish some of the street grid that was lost and bring back elements of the Oglethorpe Plan. Also need shops that cater to locals; opportunities exist in new Arena district. We don’t need office, hotel space as much as housing and retail. Not great clarity on some of the numbers so far.

Key Issues for Savannah

As noted, the City provided to panelists in advance detailed briefing materials that offered historical context for the development trajectory of the Study Area, while outlining current challenges facing the City as it considers the highest and best uses for the site.

After studying the advanced materials, listening to the Client’s onsite briefing, and considering the perspectives shared in both the community survey and onsite stakeholder interviews, the panelists concluded that the key priorities for the TAP project are to help the City:

- **Reconnect neighborhoods.** The Civic Center site has been a dividing line, both literally in that it serves as

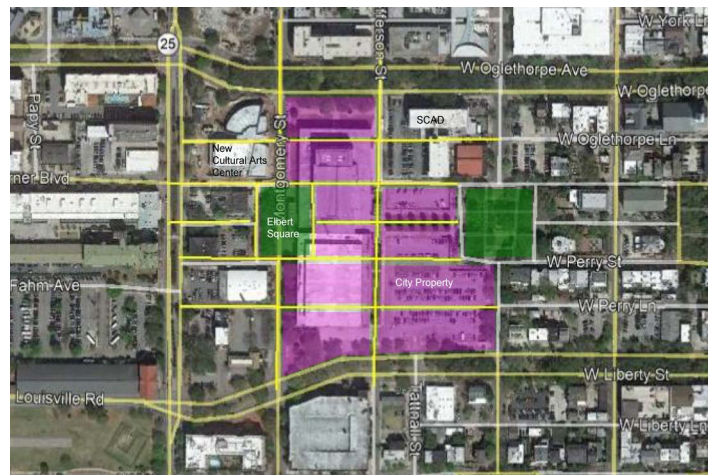
a physical barrier between disparate socioeconomic neighborhoods and development footprints in the City; and culturally, for the residents whose neighborhoods and economic vitality were negatively affected when the site was originally developed. Finding ways to remove this barrier is a priority.

- **Address challenges resulting from “Urban Renewal” efforts in mid-20th Century.** Redevelopment of the site is an opportunity to restore some of what was lost in previous redevelopment iterations. It is also a chance to connect some of the growth and investment that has occurred east of MLK to the potential development slated for the Canal and New Arena Districts to the west.
- **Lean westward.** The new Arena is slated to open late 2021; nearly everything that happens at the current MLK Arena (Disney on Ice shows, Sesame Street Live, graduations, headliner concerts) can happen at the new Arena. However, smaller productions, such as Broadway shows, plays, local dance competitions, and Philharmonic performances, will be more challenging to hold in the new space. The City reports that it is working with Arena consultants to explore ways to customize the new Arena space to meet the needs of these smaller, more intimate shows.
- **Honor, then build on tradition.** Theater history goes along with Civic Center history; the site was once a source of civic pride, but now many acknowledge it is past its prime. Still, there is nostalgia for what it represents and the way it serves as a unifying focal point for the community. There is a need to bring this sense of “place” to the new Arena site and to work with the community to build new traditions in new spaces.
- **Get back on the grid.** Panelists heard a common refrain that previous civic leaders compromised the Oglethorpe Plan and cleared historic properties for development purposes. There is a strong desire to restore Elbert Square and put back the street grid. This would reclaim the lost street patterns of Jackson and Elbert Wards; reconnect streets to MLK, Jr. Blvd.; and help to address current issue of “threatened status,” in terms of City’s historic landmark designation.
- **Mix it up.** There is a desire to see mixed-use, mixed-income residential and commercial development in the Study Area. In particular, there is a need to (strategically) increase population density; bring in a

more diverse tax base; integrate additional retail, office, civic, cultural and (a limited amount of) entertainment opportunities into the current mix. There is a need to provide more affordable housing options and living wage jobs for residents. City leadership would like to explore options for these uses, while remaining true to its centuries-old commitment to the Oglethorpe Plan and historic preservation.

- **Look critically at the operations of the Civic Center Complex.** There are currently approximately 60-70 events a year happening at the Civic Center site, but operation costs, inconsistent ticket sales, and infrastructure are big hurdles. Some key challenges are: ongoing HVAC issues; skyboxes and VIP seating; deferred maintenance in an aging facility; and outdated elevator cabs and restrooms. The box office lacks sufficient inventory control and an adequate point-of-sale system; and ticket sales are limited by an inability to contract with concert promoters, such as Live Nation (profit margin does not meet criteria for private contractors).
 - The theatre is not ADA-compliant, the décor is outdated, some steps and seating are in disrepair, and there are many complaints about acoustics and accessibility issues.
 - As a next step, the City should consider an assessment of the facility’s operations to understand the magnitude of the repairs and cost of continued operations.

NOTE: Please see “Economic Viability of the Civic Center site” section under “Existing Conditions” for more of the panelists’ analysis on this subject.



A rendering of restoring the grid overlaying a Google Earth image.

Framework for Recommendations

ULI panelists based their work on the belief that every successful project is built upon a shared vision – in this case, a vision for the site that would best serve Savannah residents and businesses; its municipal, cultural, and faith-based institutions; its tourism industry; and its many first-time and repeat visitors. In this spirit, panelists worked collaboratively to create a unifying framework for the site that would guide their recommendations and provide context for each idea presented.

Framework

- Establish a shared vision and set common goals that best serve the City's/public's needs
- Capitalize on strengths and mitigate weaknesses
- Reinstate pieces of the Oglethorpe Plan
- Consider highest and best uses of the site
- Understand fundamentals of economics related to recommendations

Shared vision and common goals identified through TAP:

- Support the Historic Landmark District Designation
- Restore Oglethorpe Plan
- Create Tax Revenue
- Revitalize Urban Forestry
- Bring in Mixed-use Development
- Stimulate Positive Economic Impact

Further consensus-building required:

- Determine how success will be measured
- Assess whether there is a need for civic/cultural facilities on site
- Is there a need for a facility the size of Mercer Theatre elsewhere in the City?
- Are there additional opportunities to achieve other community goals (e.g. sustainability, mixed-income housing)?
- Rank priorities of various development/redevelopment initiatives



Source: ULI's report
*Successful Public Private
Partnership: From
Principles to Practices*

A shared vision that is created and embraced by key stakeholders will stand the test of time and will persevere through implementation.

Ten Principles, 9.

S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

(Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)



The ULI panelists performed a S.W.O.T. analysis to identify significant Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats related to the study area.

Strengths

- Historic District character. One of the largest Historic Districts in the U.S. at 0.825 square miles or 528.5 acres; includes approximately 1,969 contributing buildings
- 14 million visitors per year, a third of which are “tourists” as defined by stakeholders in working in this segment
- Class A development nearby demonstrates strong market fundamentals
- Downtown resident support and passion for the Oglethorpe Plan
- Excellent location, considered A+ for real estate values in Historic District, adjacent to other redevelopment, good visibility, access
- Achievable rents and sale prices for commercial and retail uses in the Historic District are very strong, meaning that market-rate development on the site could be achieved with little to no subsidy

- Location characteristics, walking distance and access to hotels, museums, and parks
- Adjacent parking, access to interstate
- Energy, design, and street life created through SCAD
- Facility: Serves a niche for audience size, as well as more affordable option for civic and community events. Unique assets, such as Mercer Theatre stage
- City’s ownership – ability to influence what happens on this site
- Represents significant acreage in the Historic District

Weaknesses

- Not clear how to pay for improvements, value of current land (hard costs, such as demolition, infrastructure improvements, site preparation)
- Constraints of Oglethorpe Plan (historic grid with lanes) limits options to projects of a smaller scale, which generally translates to higher-end, more exclusive development
- Redevelopment of this site will be complicated and will require effort, organization, funding, and political

capital. As of yet, no individual, organization, or agency has emerged as a Champion for this effort.

- Current facility serves as “wall” in the community and is functionally challenged with poor acoustics and dated infrastructure
- Lack of housing affordable to young professionals, SCAD graduates, service industry
- Lack of robust business recruitment to downtown to balance and diversify the economy

Opportunities

- Mixed-use development would stimulate economic activity
- Consensus building on economics of options (demo, renovate, develop) is a chance to bring stakeholders together
- Creating job opportunities to retain educated, creative workforce emerging from SCAD and other institutions
- Could attract a more robust incubator, flex space
- Tech “corridor” should be where the talent wants to be
- This site serves as the “connective tissue” for the city; opportunity to remove a psychological barrier with regard to the east and west of MLK Blvd. Removing walls may enhance public mobility, visibility, safety.
- Redevelopment of the site with non-tax-exempt uses would return a vast tract of valuable land back to the tax rolls, and generate public revenue through property, sales, and payroll taxes.
- Arena site can be home to cultural and community assets
- The Civic Center site is emblematic of a legacy of poor and inequitable planning and development decisions. Restoring and redeveloping the site presents a chance to right these historic wrongs.
- Restore Elbert and Jackson wards and honor Oglethorpe Plan in a new way

Threats

- Potential for the “French Quarter” effect, which brings loss of residential in favor of entertainment district
- Market-rate development could lead to high rents and prices. A lack of strong policies to encourage or mandate affordable or mixed-income housing could make the redeveloped area out of reach for many potential users.
- The site could be developed in a generic and purely commercial manner that does not provide opportunities to strengthen community.
- Potential loss of cultural experiences and exposure for residents
- Losing place and a community gathering space; a disruption of current civic norms
- Competing priorities have the potential to cancel each other out, risking a slowdown of political momentum
- What happens if Arena plan is delayed or canceled?
- Plans to remove the I-16 flyover will have an impact – how to plan for the new traffic patterns and a restored “gateway” effect?

Historical Context of the Oglethorpe Plan

The Savannah Magic

Whether a resident of Savannah or one of its many visitors, one cannot help but feel a connection to that elusive quality that others have been talking about, writing about, singing about and trying to capture in nearly every art form for centuries: Historic Savannah has a way of drawing you in and making you want to stay.

To stroll through one of the legendary squares in Savannah's Historic District is to walk in step with the City founders. Their vision was to create an egalitarian society, far away from hierarchical England, that was built on opportunity and democratic ideals. One can almost imagine James Oglethorpe joining one of the district's walking tours to point out features of his architectural and horticultural legacy, while talking about his early hopes for the city he helped build on Yamacraw bluff.

Man with a Plan

Historians tell us that Oglethorpe imagined Savannah as a blank slate, a place that could become a model of agrarian living in the English colonies. In Oglethorpe's view, all people

— regardless of race, religion, or economic status — would be free to work for the betterment of their families and for the community.

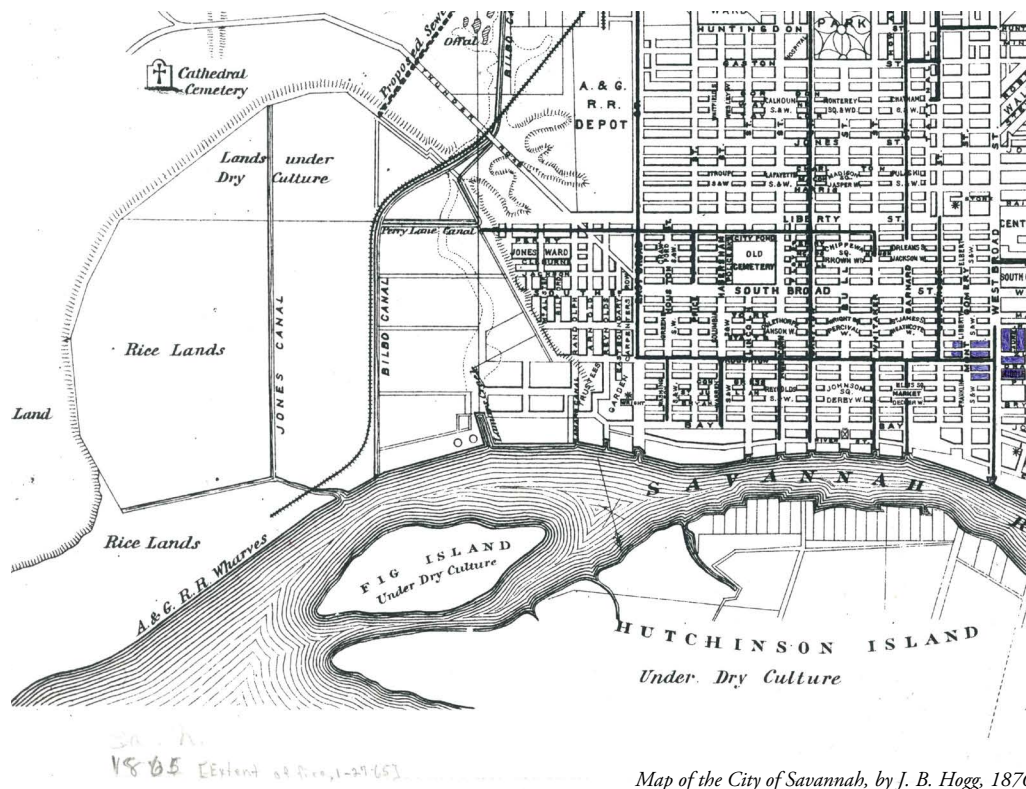
It's a simplified, utopian account of Oglethorpe's dream, the complexities of which are difficult to grasp so many years later. It's clear, however, that it would take centuries of setbacks and painful conflict for his ideals of a free society to take root. And, as the panel observed through its review of Savannah's development timeline (from Oglethorpe's arrival in 1733 to the present), the history of that struggle is as much a part of the City as its iconic landmarks.

Any discussion of a return to the Oglethorpe Plan would not be complete without recognizing the underlying principles of the original vision, as well as the historical and cultural influences that made their implementation challenging for so many for so long.

Sources:

georgiahistory.com

asce.org



Map of the City of Savannah, by J. B. Hogg, 1876

“ [O]ne of the original 24 squares, referred to as Elbert Square, was lost [first] to Highway 17 in the 1930s and continued [to be compromised] with the construction of the I-16 exit ramp in the late 1960s. In 1972, the Civic Center Complex replaced the 1917 City’s [Municipal] Auditorium and claimed the remaining portion of Elbert and Jackson Squares. ”

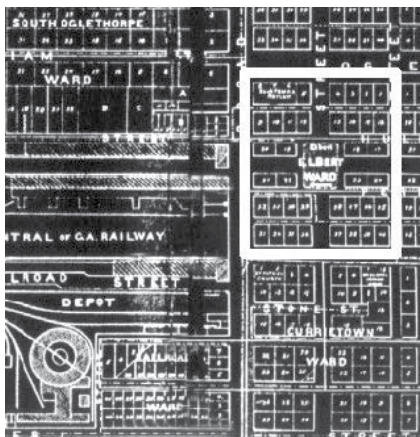
Existing Conditions

Arriving in Savannah via the I-16 flyover is an abrupt experience for visitors, not unlike the last few seconds of a roller coaster ride as it returns to the station. As the roadway tapers and merges into Montgomery Street, motorists must decide whether to go left, right or center through a series of intersections. There isn’t much time to grasp that they have landed in the heart of historic downtown Savannah. (While panelists realize this area was not designed as an official “gateway,” they feel the potential to reimagine it as such should be explored.)

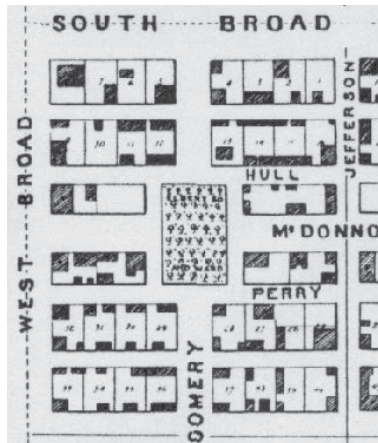


An image showing how the I-16 flyover cuts through downtown Savannah.

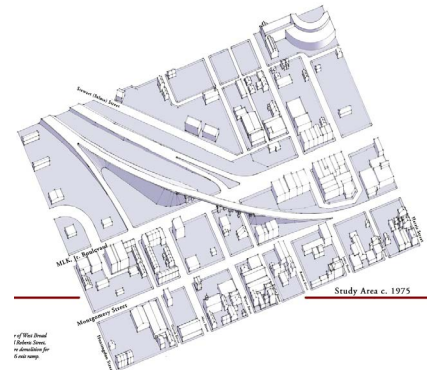
As Montgomery Street continues past West Liberty Street to Oglethorpe Avenue, it cuts through Elbert Square – one of the original 24 squares in the Oglethorpe Plan. Most visitors would still never realize they were in the Historic District at this point, much less that they were moving through one of the wards that had thrived in the early twentieth century. The only vestige of Elbert Square that remains is the patch of green to the west of Montgomery Street called Elbert Park.



Map of the City of Savannah, 1902



Vincent's Subdivision Map of the City of Savannah, 1853



NEIGHBORHOOD DEMOLITION & CLEARANCE

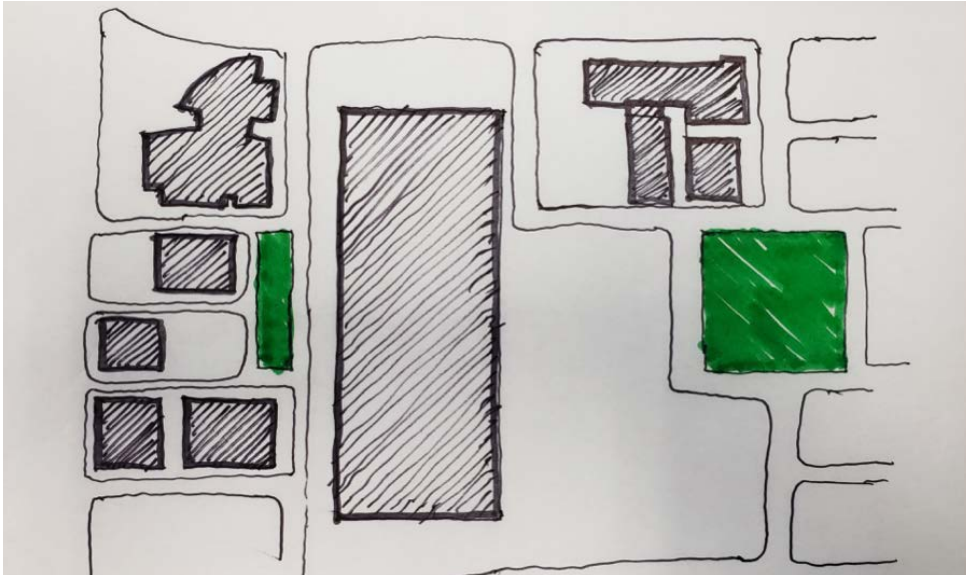
Illustration by Sottile & Sottile taken from "I-16 Exit Ramp Removal Project; Reclaiming Old West Broad Street"

To the east of Montgomery Street, on the other half of what had been Elbert Ward/Elbert Square, and taking L-shaped swaths out of Jackson Ward around Orleans Square, is the 7-acre, 10-block-wide Savannah Civic Center complex at the heart of the Study Area. Flanked by West Oglethorpe, Montgomery, West Liberty, and Barnard streets, the buildings serve as a monolith, a concrete barrier – visually, logistically and, as noted earlier, psychologically – to the Historic District beyond.

To support operations of the new Savannah Cultural Arts Center located on the southwest corner of Montgomery Street and Oglethorpe Avenue, the City is currently converting one-way traffic along Montgomery Street between West Liberty and Broughton streets to two-way. This is one step in a multi-phased process to begin restoring lost elements of the Oglethorpe Plan.

Economic Viability of the Civic Center Site

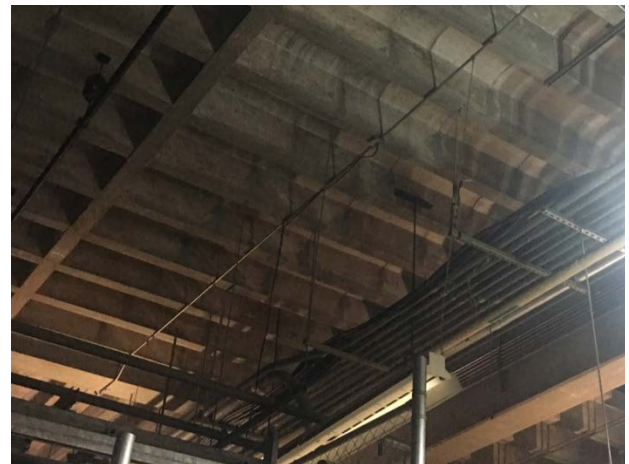
Panelists spent two days using the Civic Center as a base for this project. As noted in other sections of this report, included in the process was a tour of the facility, use of the meeting rooms, and a walk around the exterior of the site.



- Little visible pattern remains
- Large 'super block' building that creates a "wall"
- Loss of Squares and character of Ward.

Though this review was very high-level and brief, the team explored the condition of the building, the possibility of re-use/re-purposing, along with possible scenarios of partial re-use. We recommend a detailed assessment by a consultant.

- **Structure and Materials.** The Civic Center is built upon a cast-in-place concrete joist and girder system. The benefits of this system are that it is very durable and usually has a high loading capacity that allows for many different uses. The downside is that this system is particularly difficult to modify, as reinforcement of the concrete typically is not known and requires extensive testing to determine. An additional study will be needed to understand the full scope of cost.
- **Mechanical / Electrical / Plumbing Systems (M/E/P)**
 - It was communicated to the team and noted through panelists' first-hand experience, that the mechanical systems at the site posed some challenges, especially with regard to solar orientation and measuring devices. Conditioned air was either too much or too little and created over-cooled or under-cooled spaces, depending on control information.
 - The building also contains a Georgia Power substation in the north basement. Follow-up questions to City staff revealed that the electric substation serves only the Civic Center and not the adjacent blocks. While the power source can be shut down, dismantled and removed, it should be noted that this would leave the property without a power source. A replacement power source would need to be designed as part of any redevelopment plan. Estimates for this process should be sought by the City as part of its decision-making process.



Current Civic Center ceiling

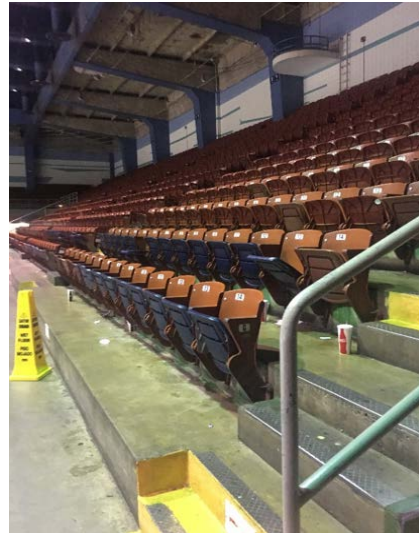


Basement transfer station

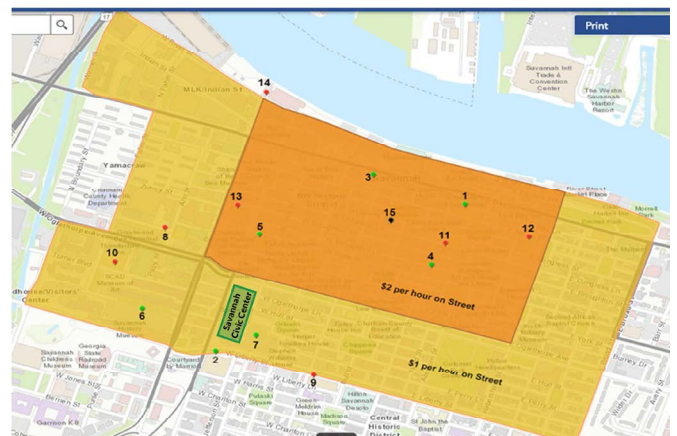
- It was also noted that the restroom facilities were out of date and not set-out in a design common to more contemporary facilities. These would require extensive upgrading to meet newer standards, including Georgia Energy Codes.
- **Accessibility.** This was a particular concern in the MLK Arena, as many of the areas are only accessible by stairs or circuitous routes. Accessible seating is often provided on court level in narrow spaces and exposed to potential game or performance hazards. The theater also did not comply with current ADA-accessibility standards and would require extensive updates to improve access to performances. Restrooms, stairs, ramps and other features of the building were not fully evaluated, but some defects were noted that would have to be addressed in the event of re-use or renovation. A more exhaustive study would be required to understand the full scope of cost.
- **Fiberoptic Infrastructure.** The site currently houses four distinct fiberoptic cable paths that provide network services to various municipal entities. Should the site be redeveloped, the City asserts that this equipment could be relocated to the main data closet of the Cultural Arts Center at an estimated cost between \$150,000 to \$250,000 within a possible timeframe of six months.
- **Current Emergency Uses.** Also of note are two emergency functions currently housed in the basement of the Civic Center site: it is used as a backup location for 911 call center operations by the County; and as the City's Emergency Command Center (ECC). The ECC has plans to move their operations to the City's Critical Workforce Shelter Facility in the near future; however, if it is decided that the Civic Center structures should be removed, an alternate location would be needed for the 911 backup function. Until a decision is made, the City says both entities will continue to use the space as needed.
- **Grounds and Parking.** The grounds and parking lot appear to be in functional condition. It was noted that the facility provides inexpensive parking within the City and is used during non-event times by commuters. The panel noted that the municipally-owned Liberty Street Parking Garage to the south also appeared to be under-used during non-event times.



Ice rink surface



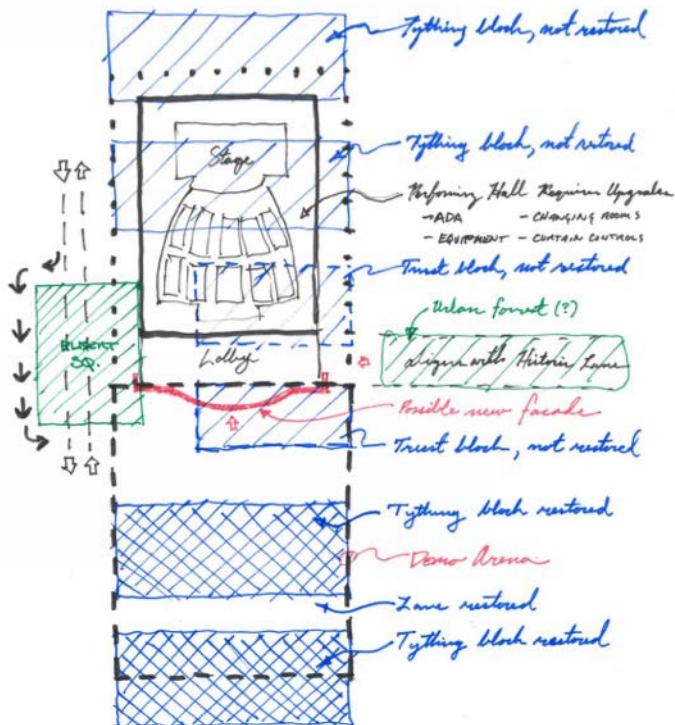
Arena seats and stairs



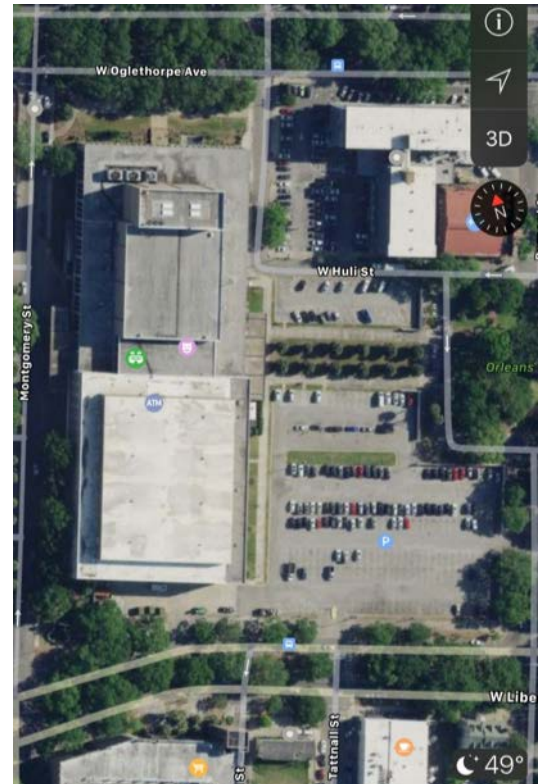
Civic Center parking map

An option to save the theater portion of the building was discussed by the panel. This approach included the demolition of the MLK Arena south of the shared lobby; construction of a new façade for the south face (see diagram below); and upgrades to the remaining facility. This would return only four of the original tything blocks to the urban fabric, leaving Elbert Square unrestored and six other blocks not restored.

When this approach and the potential cost of renovation was weighed against the portion of the Historic District unable to be returned to the original ward plan, the panel determined that this was not an ideal solution.



Sketch of façade



Aerial view of Civic Center buildings

TAP Recommendations

It cannot be overstated what an important role the Civic Center has played in the past four-plus decades for the City of Savannah. The MLK Arena, the Johnny Mercer Theatre, and the other common spaces in the complex have been the site for important milestones for individuals and families, as well as for visitors to Savannah since the day it opened its doors.

Students of all ages have walked across the Arena stage to receive their diplomas; performers and audiences have enjoyed shows in the facility (blockbusters like Disney on Ice, Sesame Street Live, holiday concerts, and more intimate concerts, as well); couples have danced their first dances in wedding receptions in the third-floor ballroom; and the meeting spaces have been home to countless public and private collaborations. Citizens come to the complex to vote, to shelter in a storm, and to talk about issues affecting all Savannahians.

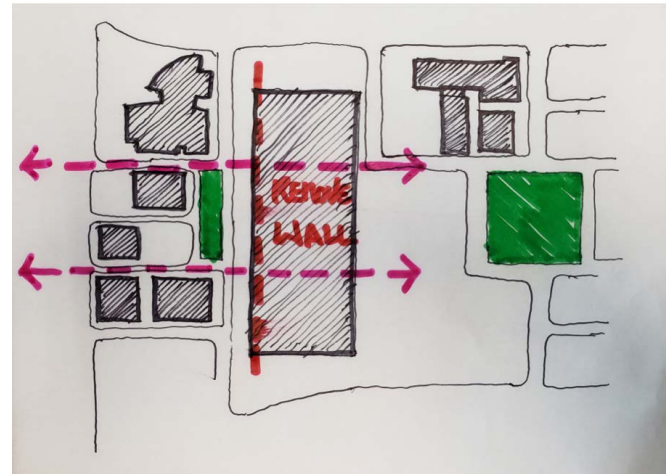
These uses have been and should remain vitally important priorities for the City as it seeks to both honor the past and move forward with plans to revitalize the Study Area. However, it is the panel's view that it is no longer feasible for these activities to occur in this particular place at this time in the City's growth trajectory. The costs are deemed to be too high, based on the panel's understanding of the rough capital expenditures presented. A detailed analysis would be needed to determine the actual amount of capital expenditure required, in terms of renovations and compliance upgrades. Furthermore, the disruption to the Oglethorpe Plan that the site represents may be incurring another, more intangible cost: that is, whatever value the City, its residents and visitors place on historic authenticity – that hard-to-measure quality that makes Savannah unique.

The panel believes that the City could work collaboratively with stakeholders to find other venues for these civic uses, some of which may still take place in a reimagined mixed-use scenario on the property. In addition, community assets, such as the "urban forest" and Oglethorpe's principles of architectural landscape, should be revisited and reprioritized at this location. The City must also continue to work with stakeholders to finalize the exact program of desired uses, population density, product configurations, and levels of economic return it will pursue. Once this is done, the City should consider a phased strategy to implement its vision for the Study Area. A timeline for

how these steps might be accomplished follows in the report, beginning with four key recommendations set forth by the panelists at the conclusion of this TAP:

Recommendations

I. Remove Wall



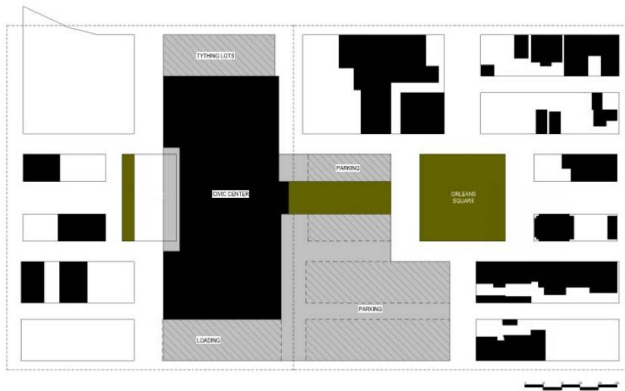
Remove the wall

As noted in the Existing Conditions section of this report, the current Civic Center represents a monolithic presence that impinges on two historic wards and squares. Vehicular and pedestrian traffic is blocked along once viable east-west thoroughfares, which has curtailed economic growth and limited residents' and visitors' access to the Historic District.

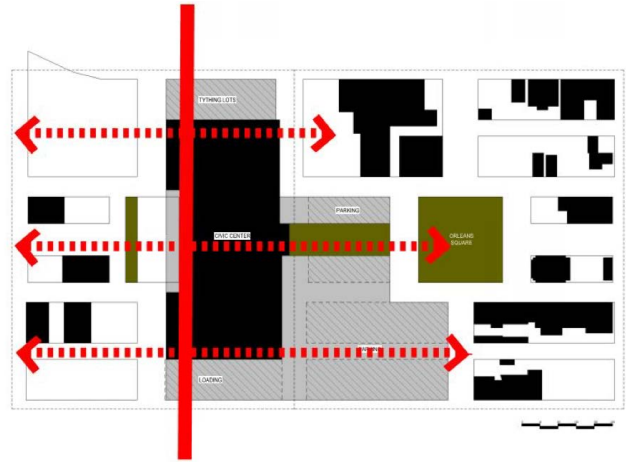
Many urban planners will note that walkable and active streets are best when a block's perimeter is less than 2,000 feet and sides are between 240 feet and 600 feet. The Civic Center in its current form not only disrupts the Oglethorpe ward pattern, it creates an oversized block that functions as a barrier for the walkability of the Historic District. The Civic Center block exceeds 2,000 linear feet, coming in at approximately 2,600 linear feet. While this is not excessive, it should be noted that this is well over the average block size of the Historic District, which averages 800 linear feet of perimeter. It also has two sides that are more than 725 feet-long, creating a wall-like effect for east-west travel.

While City leaders in the mid- to late-twentieth century may have felt that their urban renewal efforts would stimulate growth in the area, the panel believes that the

“ [Garvin] found that the secret to urban greatness stems from management of the streets, squares, parks, and special places that make up the ‘public realm.’ To maintain greatness, cities must not only maintain but also ‘continually alter their public realm to meet the changing needs of their occupants.’” – from “In Print: What Makes a Great City,” a review of Alexander Garvin’s book *What Makes a Great City*, by David R. Godschalk in the *Urban Land* magazine, published online Dec. 2, 2016.”



Existing Civic Center block



Civic Center as barrier for connectivity

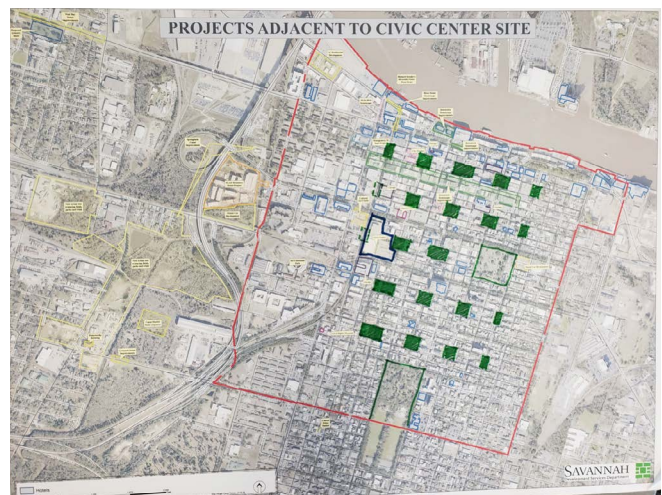
time has come to, as one stakeholder put it, “right some historical wrongs,” in terms of development strategies.

It is the panel’s strong recommendation that the entire Civic Center complex be removed and preparations for the restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan in this area be pursued.

II. Re-establish Square and Street Patterns

The goal is to re-establish the “spirit” of the Oglethorpe Plan, not necessarily to create a literal translation. Applying the underlying organizational principles of the Plan as a place-making tool and framework for new development, the City can return to a more contextual scale and character. This, in turn, will allow for building pads that support the programmatic needs of today’s development environment.

In doing so, the City will achieve its stated goal of reconnecting neighborhoods that are currently separated by the “wall” of the Civic Center. It will also restore a grid that could be more conducive to the kind of “dot-to-dot-to-dot” development potential the panel recommends. In other words, with a restored Oglethorpe Plan activating the missing Elbert Square, the City can explore ways to enliven pedestrian and bicycle connectivity and encourage development that would further connect the Historic District to the proposed Canal District and beyond to the new Arena site.



Urban forms and connectivity in context

- Recreate streets that were lost when Civic Center site closed off portions of Elbert Square. Note: Adding lanes would severely limit development opportunities, as blocks are too small for multifamily and mixed use.
- Re-establish tything blocks and trust blocks

Proposed redevelopment of the site must adhere to the original ward pattern for Elbert Square to re-establish east-west connectivity. It should also be noted that the more the east-west connections can be replicated in wards/

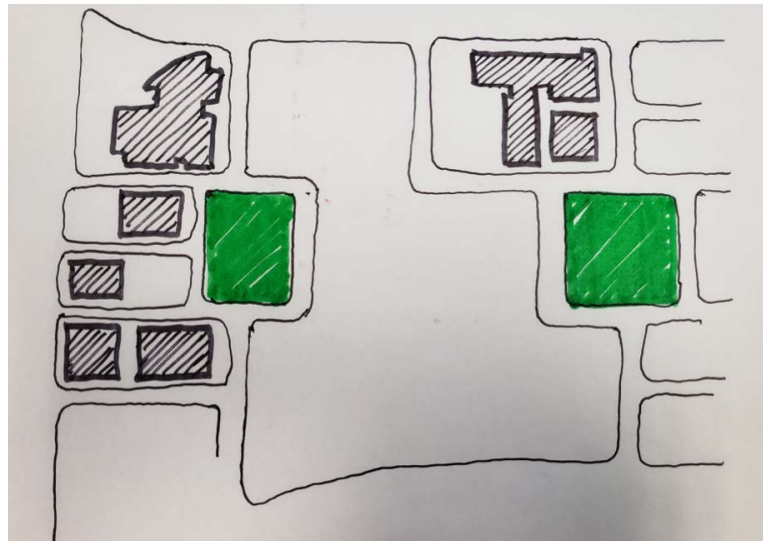
blocks to the west, the more connectivity will be established with the new Canal District and future Arena. This may require more bridges, streets, and other access types.

The Historic District significance can be prioritized into three levels. These are, descending from the most important: 1) Urban Street-Block pattern of the ward system; 2) the massing of block construction; and 3) the architecture of the historic buildings. It is imperative that redevelopment pushes toward these principles to preserve the Historic District and improve its historic designation with the National Park Service.

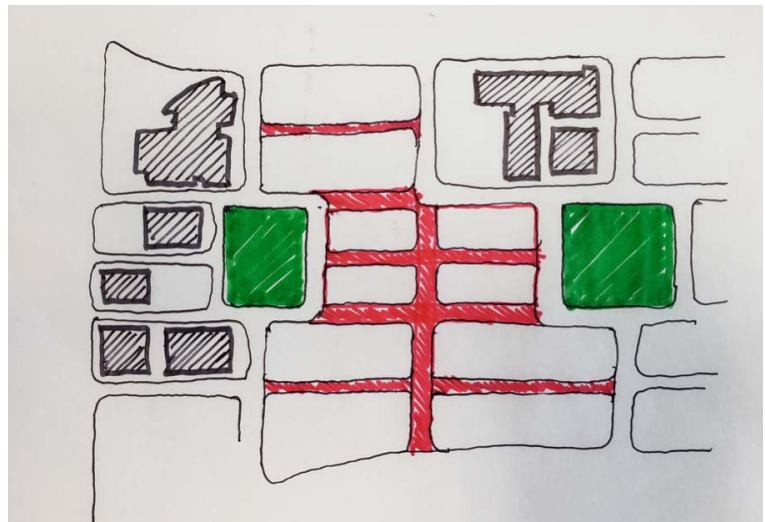
III. Establish Height Limits

Panelists looked closely at the Historic Zoning Ordinance document that dictates design standards and height limits in the Historic District. They also heard from many stakeholders that any restoration of the Oglethorpe Plan would limit the kind of development opportunities the City could pursue. The panel thought that the impetus to restore the streets and lost square was just as compelling as the need to stimulate economic activity and put the site back on the tax rolls. Therefore, if the streets were reinstated as public rights-of-way — or other opportunities were pursued, such as affordable housing, multiple ground-floor active uses, LEED Gold Certification or verified equivalent developments — the panel suggests that the City work collaboratively with its partners to modify height limits before any RFP process begins. The panel recommends the following considerations for new development on the site while following the standards outlined in the Historic District Ordinance:

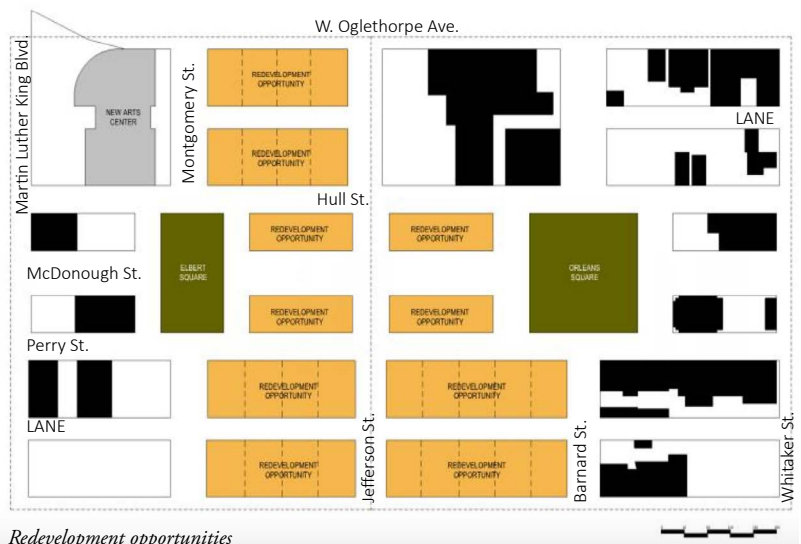
- Four to six stories closer to Montgomery Street, currently four stories permitted on the east side of Montgomery between Perry Lane and Oglethorpe Lane
- Two to four stories closer to Barnard Street, currently four stories permitted between Perry Lane and Oglethorpe Lane



Re-establish the square



Re-establish street patterns



Redevelopment opportunities

- The option of four to six stories closer to West Liberty Street and West Oglethorpe Avenue, currently five stories permitted between Montgomery Street to Barnard Street

IV. Pursue Mixed-use Development

The Oglethorpe Plan, upon which Savannah’s grid of wards and squares is founded, could be considered an early ancestor of today’s mixed-use model. Each square is surrounded by a strategic arrangement of residential, municipal, and commercial buildings, interlaced by rows and columns of streets and lanes. As the City considers a return to this Plan, and based on the other recommendations in the TAP report, panelists suggest a modified “return” to some of key elements and uses that have made the Oglethorpe Plan so compelling to urban planners all over the world.

- **Civic Space.** Savannahians have been using the land under and adjacent to the Civic Center site for communal purposes for decades, dating back to the construction of the City’s Municipal Auditorium in 1916. With the restoration of Elbert Square, the City has an opportunity to cultivate a renewed identity and character for the space – something panelists heard stakeholders say they missed. Additionally, there is an opportunity to honor the “public space ethos” of the Oglethorpe Plan and explore different types of civic uses on one of the restored trust lots. Recognizing this deviates from the traditional use patterns, it presents an opportunity that should be considered. The lot could be privately operated but still serve as a neighborhood amenity – a “third place” with flexible, creative uses that go beyond the beauty of the restored square itself.

The envisioned civic space does not need to be a grand



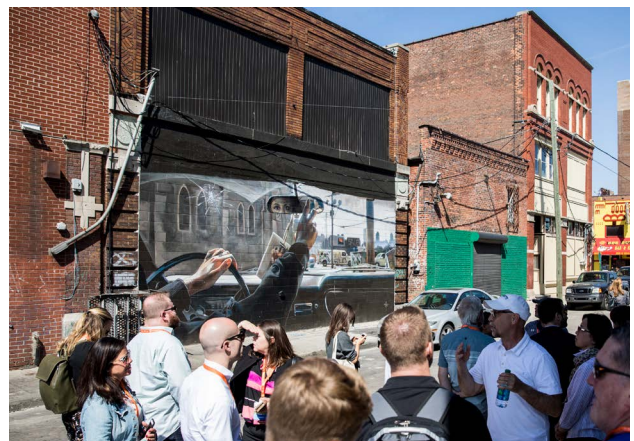
Columbus Commons, image courtesy of ULI.

“ The Civic Center facility is currently zoned Business Commercial (BC). The purpose of this district is to provide community shopping facilities consisting of a wide variety of sales and service facilities at locations that will be accessible to a market area containing from 35,000 to 70,000 people. The parking lot associated with the facility is zoned Business Commercial-1 (BC-1) with the goal of protecting and enhancing the central business district of the City which serves the Savannah metropolitan area population. As the City revises the zoning code, both the facility and parking lot will be classified as Downtown Central Business District (D-CBD) to reinforce downtown Savannah’s position as the commercial hub of the metropolitan region. [...] New construction should comply with the development standards of the Historic District Ordinance (Sec. 8-3030). ”

edifice, but rather a communal space that serves modern Savannah’s needs, notably nearby residents, to support a more livable neighborhood.

Examples of this kind of use include:

- [Dallas Farmers Market](#)
- [Commerce Street Night Market – Dallas](#)
- [Eastern Market – Detroit](#)
- [Findlay Market – Cincinnati](#)
- [Asheville Grove Arcade](#)
- [Fetch Dog Park – Atlanta](#)
- [Mutts Cantina - Dallas](#)
- [Texas Truck Yard – \(Dallas and\) Houston](#)
- [Rose City Food Park - Portland, OR](#)
- [The Wynwood Yard - Miami](#)



Eastern Market, Detroit, image courtesy of ULI.

- **Commercial.** Economic vitality in the urban context can be thought of less in terms of 24/7 activity and more in terms of an 18-hour cycle. Ideally, people would work, exercise, dine, worship, seek entertainment options and civic fellowship in and around the urban core. A thriving commercial hub in any new mixed-use development would help put more “eyes on the street,” to support this goal and to promote walkability and neighborhood character. The panel concurs with stakeholders that additional hotel space is not needed. Furthermore, given the limitation of block sizes, this area does not support a large-format, more regional-serving commercial product. Instead, the panel recommends a balance of the following:

- Ground-floor storefront space for flexible uses – not just retail, but small office space for entrepreneurs and creative professionals
- Neighborhood-serving retail uses, e.g. a small grocery/bodega, Ace Hardware, dry cleaning, etc.
- Office spaces that are unique, perhaps smaller spaces, not large-format Class A

- **Residential.** The Civic Center site, given its proximity to several commercial corridors, is an ideal area for a range of residential uses. Development should include a mix of residential product in an effort to attract a more diverse population of residents that could stimulate economic growth in the area. Determining who wants to live in downtown Savannah but cannot under current economic conditions, as well as deciding who the City wishes to attract to the area, in terms of potential workforce and tax base, are important questions to consider early on.

With an already growing residential community to the south of the Study Area, putting more residential on the Civic Center site could also balance the mix of product available in the area.

- **Workforce and “Missing Middle” Housing.** Workforce Housing and the related term, “Missing Middle Housing,” are concepts receiving increased attention in the marketplace lately, but they refer to a need that has vexed cities for years. How do you structure residential product in the urban neighborhood so that the working middle class can afford to live, shop and thrive closer to where they work?

Workforce Housing addresses the economic side of the supply and demand coin, as cities are challenged to provide residential developers ways to finance such developments in light of increasing land and construction costs. Typically, “workforce” is defined as individuals earning around 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), which varies with household size, but is about \$41,750 annually for a family of two. The City can pro-actively participate in the preservation of housing diversity by requiring a certain percentage of new units be income restricted as a term of the property disposition and/or publicly-assisted financing of the project.

“Missing Middle Housing” was first defined by David and Karen Parolek of California-based Opticos Design firm in an effort to address the shortage of what they called “diverse, affordable” housing solutions in urban neighborhoods across the U.S. Rather than describing a segment of the population, or a particular income bracket, the term “Missing Middle” refers more to the way developers can best integrate these forms – multi-family, multi-dwelling units – into market-rate neighborhoods.

With good master-planning and implementation, a range of diverse housing options can be incorporated seamlessly into the community. The panelists urge the City to examine strategies for more flexible residential uses, and most importantly, to do so early in the process.

Prior to issuing the RFP, the City should review the current zoning and make any modifications to ensure the types of mixed-uses – civic, commercial and residential – will occur.

“Neighborhoods with Missing Middle Housing can have average densities of 30-50 units per acre — plenty high in most places to be considered a responsible use of our land resources. Yet, because Missing Middle Housing has the look and feel of single-family homes, it provides the density (increasing housing supply), while retaining the neighborhood character so many people are looking for.”

— from “**The ‘Missing Middle’ Housing Affordability Solution**,” a blog post by Karen Parolek, a principal at Opticos Design in Berkeley, Calif.

The Economic Forecast

When looking at the economic forecast associated with plans to redevelop the Civic Center site, panelists were able to draw on lessons learned from a similar project in their home city of Atlanta. City leadership there recently sought redevelopment solutions for its own aging Civic Center facility. Like the Savannah facility, the property sprawled across valuable downtown land, and there were high costs to renovate and replace crumbling infrastructure (see Case Study). In Atlanta's case, the ability of the city's leadership to come to a consensus decision to move forward with the disposition of the property was a strategic decision that enabled a new future for the valuable site.

In terms of the Savannah site, panelists' preliminary, onsite research came back with estimates of the Civic Center site being worth \$12-\$18 million. They factored in \$3-4 million for demolition, and potentially another \$4-5 million to restore or build streets, curbs, and gutters, stormwater and drainage, as well as utilities. Fast forward to the estimated gross value of the property, and panelists estimated it could range anywhere from \$3-\$11 million.

Panelists strongly encourage the City to seek the best numbers on these costs as early as possible. This will make the RFP choice more efficient and will help answer one of the key unknowns: Should the City pay, and therefore keep control, of the demolition process or contract it out and experience a diminished return?

It's helpful to forecast the economic implications for this project through four different lenses:

- Site Development - What will it cost to redevelop the site?
- Costs and Financing - Who will pay the costs to redevelop the site, and how?
- Economic and Fiscal Impact - What will be the public benefits of redevelopment?
- Jobs and Housing - How much, and what sort of jobs and housing could we expect to see at this site if redeveloped?

Site Development

The Civic Center site, given its current footprint, is undoubtedly a valuable asset. As mentioned above in the

A valuable asset but not without inevitable costs for demolition and site preparation

Estimated Net Value of Site

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Est Land Value (Cleared) | \$12-\$18 Million |
| Demolition | (\$3-\$4 Million) |
| Site Prep | (\$4 to \$5 Million) |
| Net Value | \$3 to \$11 Million |

stakeholder section, the panelists agree that it should not be difficult to attract investors to any repurposed development opportunity. While certain construction materials in the onsite structures could be recycled, it is expected that there will be significant – and possibly unexpected – demolition and site preparation costs for a project of this size.

These costs are inevitably borne by the property owner, either in sale price or pre-development costs. In terms of this project, the City can expect those costs to be reflected in the gross value of any future sale. The City should determine early on how it will address these costs to include:

- Does it make sense to establish a Tax Allocation District?
- Should bonds be issued?
- Should costs be paid for in cash?
- Is there an opportunity for a work on a developer-financed deal?
- Should the sale occur in phases that uses the proceeds of phase 1 to pay for phase 2?

All are viable options, and the right solution should present itself when all of the due diligence is completed and the RFPs are in.

Costs and Financing

Another crucial part of the due diligence phase will be to determine the economic implications of the project – not only in terms of demolition and site development, but

before, during and after the building phase. When solid estimates are in hand, a strategic financing plan, along with trusted partnerships, can and should be put into place as soon as possible.

There are several deal structures that can be effective models for this type of large-scale project, presented here in the order recommended by panelists.

- **Fee Development Manager for Horizontal Development** - In which the City hires a professional development firm on a fee basis to manage the demolition and site preparation process, the costs of which would be paid for by the City. Once established, individual blocks or parcels can be sold through an RFP. Conditions on use should be established as part of the sale conditions. While the City may incur more upfront costs in this scenario, being able to offer a clean site, ready for vertical development, should increase the value of the property exponentially.
- **Master Developer** - In which the City conveys the entire site to a master developer, who then manages the site preparation and redevelopment of individual pieces.
- **Phased Sale** - In which easy-to-develop parts of the site, such as parking lots, are sold to be redeveloped early in order to generate funds to support the more complicated phases of the redevelopment process. In this scenario, it is assumed that private developers cover most or all of the public infrastructure costs.
- **Ground Lease** - In which the City retains ownership of the land. This gives the City more leverage to impose conditions on public benefits, such as workforce housing, as well as eventual ownership of the improvements. However, this option may hamper efforts to attract development partners. It can also lead to eventual structural neglect: property owners are hesitant to improve properties with less than ten years left on the leasehold.
- **Public/Private Partnership** - In which the City partners directly with a development team to redevelop the site. This is most useful if the City intends to retain a significant portion of the site for a public use, such as a municipal government center or cultural facility. The City could sell to a private developer but maintain some part of the site as a municipal facility for job training or some other civic use.

What could city expect to see in property tax revenue after redevelopment?

| | |
|---|---------------|
| City | \$420,000 |
| Schools | \$540,000 |
| Transit | \$40,000 |
| County | \$400,000 |
| Total Estimated Annual Property Tax Revenue | \$1.4 Million |

No matter which of these paths the City of Savannah chooses to follow, it is important to note that for a project of this size and scope, all of these options will require the participation of experienced professional development and public finance experts. Ideally, this would be a hired advisor or a City staffer dedicated to this project.

Economic and Fiscal Impact

The redevelopment of the Civic Center site would create significant public revenue from a variety of sources. Once a redevelopment vision for the site is agreed upon, the City should commission a study to estimate the economic and fiscal impacts of both the construction process and, more importantly, of new property value and economic activity that will occur on the site.

For planning purposes, it is imperative that firm estimates are procured for the following:

- Sales tax revenues and collected revenues from permits and fees
- Projected tax revenue from new construction (materials, wages, utility connection fees, sales taxes)
- Economic activity from demolition, pre-development, site preparation and construction
- Economic activity from new residents and jobs after redevelopment
- Increased public revenues from the “Halo Effect,” as

improvements to the site creates additional value in adjoining and adjacent properties

- Revenues expected from future commercial uses and new jobs

If the City is successful in a full build-out and restoration of the area's missing elements of the Oglethorpe Plan, and a moderate density is achieved (consistent with neighboring blocks), the panel estimates that the redevelopment could lead to an increase of \$1.4 million in property taxes annually, with following allocations:

Additional revenue would come from sales taxes and other public revenues. With higher density comes more residents, business owners and workers and, therefore, more local spending. Further study is needed here to properly assess all sources of potential tax revenues.

Jobs and Housing

In addition to those outlined in the recommendations section, panelists agree that the City can expect the following economic benefits if it pursues mixed-use development on the site:

- A chance to diversify the City's employment base
- Potential partnerships for economic development and job incubation
- Opportunities for mixed-income housing and "Missing Middle" product (see recommendations)
- A chance to attract and retain millennials who may feel they need to leave the area upon graduating from SCAD and other area universities/colleges

Implementation and Phasing

Before there was an Oglethorpe Plan, there was simply a man named James Oglethorpe who stood on a bluff overlooking a river, wondering what the highest and best use might be for the land he stood on. He envisioned a new kind of city in a new land that would be part of a future he knew he'd never see.

It took hundreds of years for Savannah to become the beloved place it is today. Change takes time, even when part of that change means restoring something fundamental like the Oglethorpe Plan that was lost along the way.

Heading into 2019, ULI panelists agree that the City should continue to look for ways to stimulate economic growth on the western edge of the Historic District and beyond. While plans for the new Arena are put into action, the panelists suggest that the City take a phased approach for implementation of the ideas presented in this report.

That way, as other projects come to the foreground – e.g., the expansion of the Arena site into a multi-purpose municipal and commercial complex; development opportunities connecting the new Arena site and Historic District to a future Canal District; new civic and arts uses emerging after the opening of the Cultural Arts Center – leadership will have the flexibility to recalibrate plans along the way.

In terms of the four main recommendations in this TAP, the panelists recommend the following implementation and phasing strategy:

Recap of Recommendations:

Remove Wall

Re-establish Square and Street Patterns

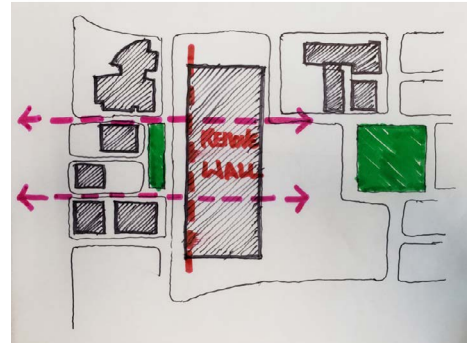
Establish Height Limits

Pursue Mixed-use Development

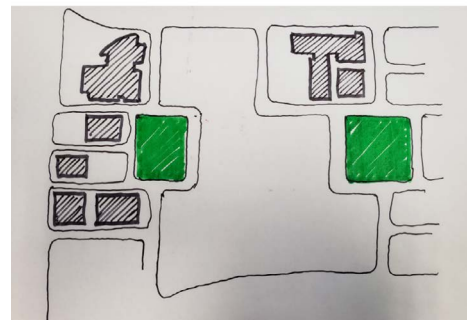
- Civic Space
- Commercial
- Residential
- Workforce “Missing Middle” Housing

Note: The proposed timeline spans approximately four years, from plan approval to completion. The City should consider these guidelines and adjust as appropriate.

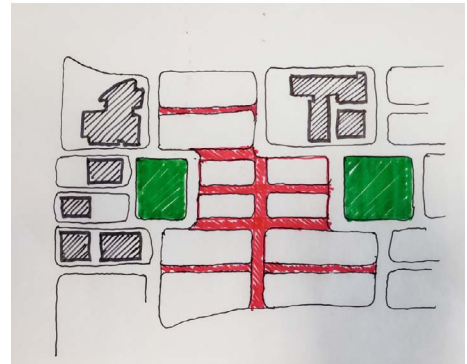
Remove Wall



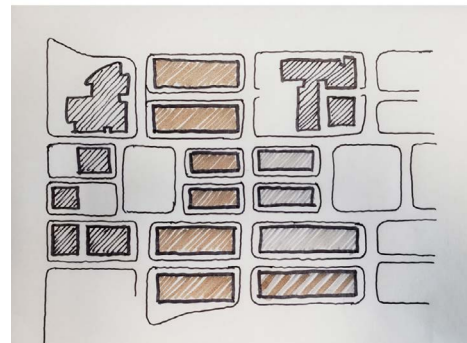
Re-establish Square



Re-establish Street Pattern



Establish Height Limits



Phasing

Short-term (1 year)

- Meet with stakeholders
 - Confirm intent to demolish the structures on the site
 - Confirm intent to restore and implement the Oglethorpe Plan
 - Assess importance of restoring streets vs. streets and lanes in Oglethorpe Plan
 - Confirm the kinds of uses desired, including the height and density of each
- Define metrics for success
- Due diligence costs, property appraisal, market analysis, infrastructure and utilities; hire outside experts to get a clear, unbiased understanding of what's involved
- Establish financial strategy and deal structure
- Develop implementation strategy, plan/schedule/phasing

Mid-term (2-3 years)

- Develop and issue RFP (Request for Proposal); the RFP is the wireframe for all that follows
- Establish financing mechanisms
- Build, solidify and maintain partnerships and agreements
- Build/execute Arena, monitoring how the progress of this project may have an impact on plans for the Civic Center site
- Begin Phase 1 construction for Civic Center site: start with infrastructure and utilities

Long-term (4+ years)

- Demolish Civic Center
- Manage process
- Monitor compliance; ensure RFP is properly executed
- Begin recognizing community economic benefits

Case Study: Atlanta Civic Center Site

In the case of the Atlanta Civic Center site, there was less concern from city leadership – as well as the community – about the need for public, community gathering space that would be lost with the site’s redevelopment. Rather, the impetus there was to a) limit financial liability with regard to maintaining the site; b) assure the highest sales proceeds; c) seek development that added to the urban fabric of downtown and provided needed connections among neighborhoods; and d) accommodate significant new residential properties, including affordable, workforce and market-rate housing.

Therefore, any consideration of the Atlanta case study as it relates to the Savannah Civic Center site examined in this TAP report, should focus on a government decision-making process that was based on financial liability and impact. The type of analysis and criterion Atlanta used – arguably not emotional or political, but factual and financial – could be instructive as the City of Savannah continues to address the following questions:

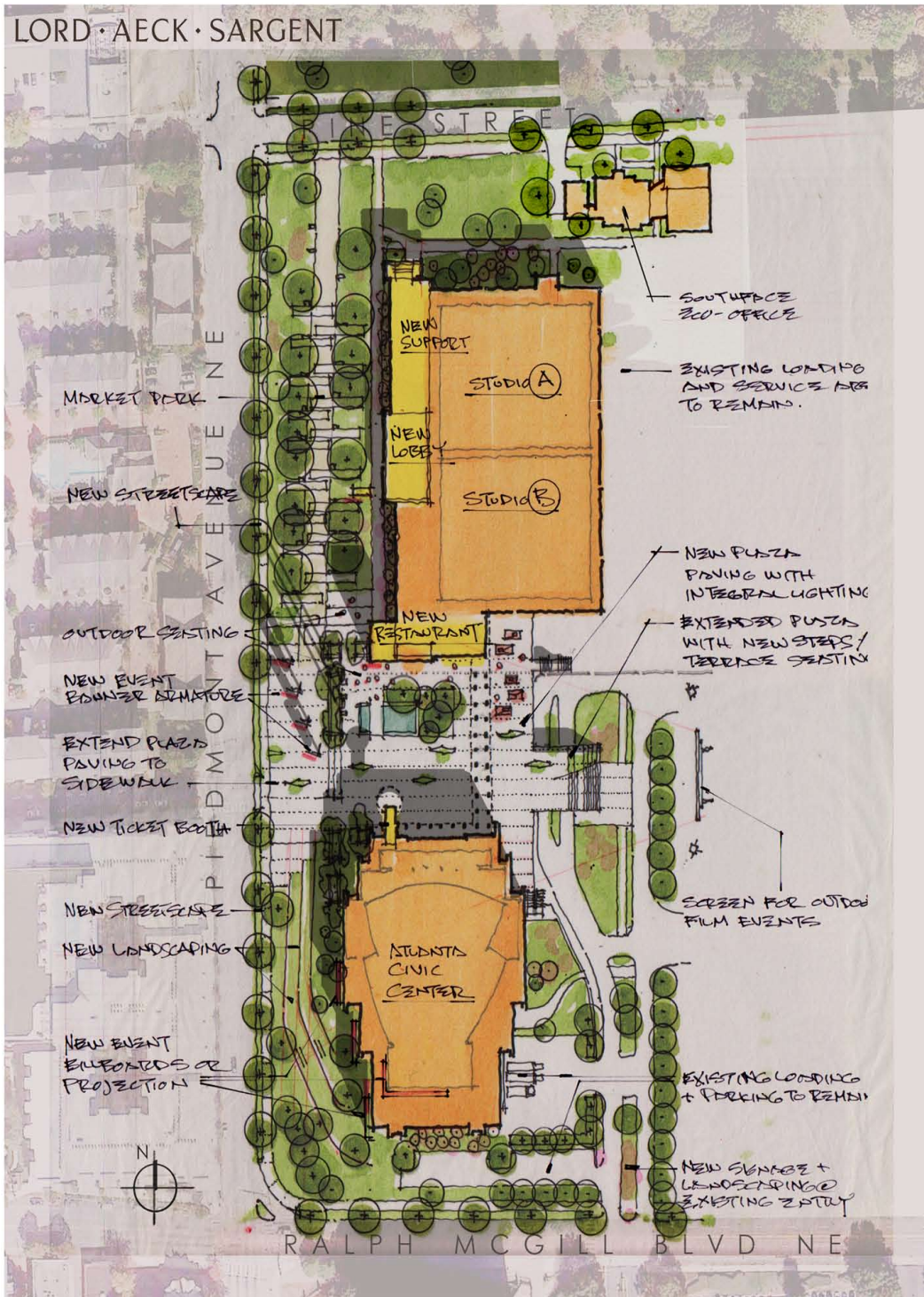
- Does the Savannah Civic Center support its operations – specifically, does revenue support operations and can it finance the necessary capital costs and modernization to be competitive?
- Is there political support to subsidize city-owned venues vs. leveraging the private sector to provide the venues?

It is important to consider another difference between the two projects. Architecturally, the Savannah Civic Center is not compatible with the period of significance of the Historic District. This is in contrast to the Atlanta Civic Center, which is more consistent with the era of historic significance of Atlanta’s rapid growth and commercialization.



aerial EXISTING CONDITIONS
ATLANTA **CIVIC** CENTER FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

LORD • AECK • SARGENT



conceptual SITE PLAN

ATLANTA CIVIC CENTER FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

City of Atlanta • CAP/ADID
HR&A • LAS • Urban Collage





MARKET PARK

view looking north from plaza

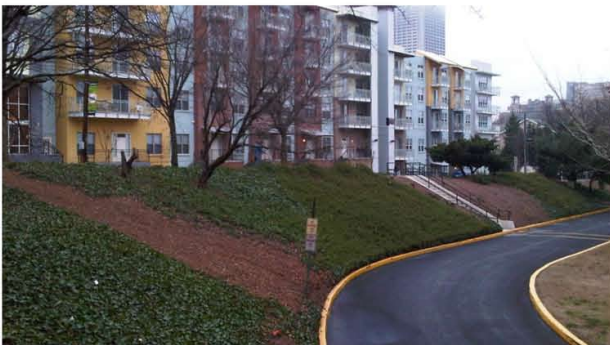
- PUBLIC AMENITY SPACE BETWEEN CIVIC CENTER PLAZA AND PINE ST.
- REINFORCE CIVIC CENTER SITE AS AN ENGAGING PUBLIC SPACE.
- INVIGORATE STREET CHARACTER WITH PUBLIC ACTIVITY - EVENTS.
- CONSOLIDATE PARKING IN BACK / SIMPLIFY VEHICULAR ACCESS.
- MINIMIZE PAVING ON FRONTAGE IN FAVOR OF PARK-LIKE SETTING.



PLAZA-PARKING EXTENSION

view looking north in parking lot

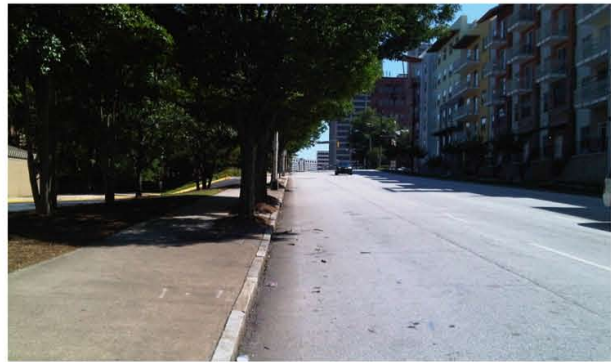
- CONNECT STREET LEVEL PLAZA TO REAR PARKING AREA.
- REINFORCE PLAZA AS THE 'MAIN' LEVEL FOR EVENTS.
- REDUCE PEDETRIAN / VEHICULAR CROSSINGS FROM PARKING.
- UNIFY ENTIRE SITE AREA TO MAXIMIZE EVENT UTILIZATION.
- PLAZA PEDESTRIAN ZONE DELINIATION FROM VEHICULAR ZONE.



TERRACED AMPITHEATER

view looking north from Ralph McGill

- UTILIZE 'BOWL' GRADE FROM STREETS AT SOUTHEAST WITH TERRACES.
- DELETE DRIVE AND PROMOTE PEDESTRIAN ACCESS ON SLOPE.
- POSSIBLE PERFORMANCE OR VIEWING OPPORTUNITIES.
- ACTIVATE CORNER OF SITE AND BLANK PERFORMANCE HALL FAÇADE.



ON-STREET PARKING

view looking south on Piedmont

- CLOSE A LANE TO CREATE ON-STREET METERED PARKING.
- CALMS TRAFFIC AND CREATES A BUFFER FOR PEDESTRIANS.
- ALLOWS FOR SOME CASUAL PARKING AND LOADING ZONE.
- REINFORCES PARK-LIKE SITE CHARACTER.

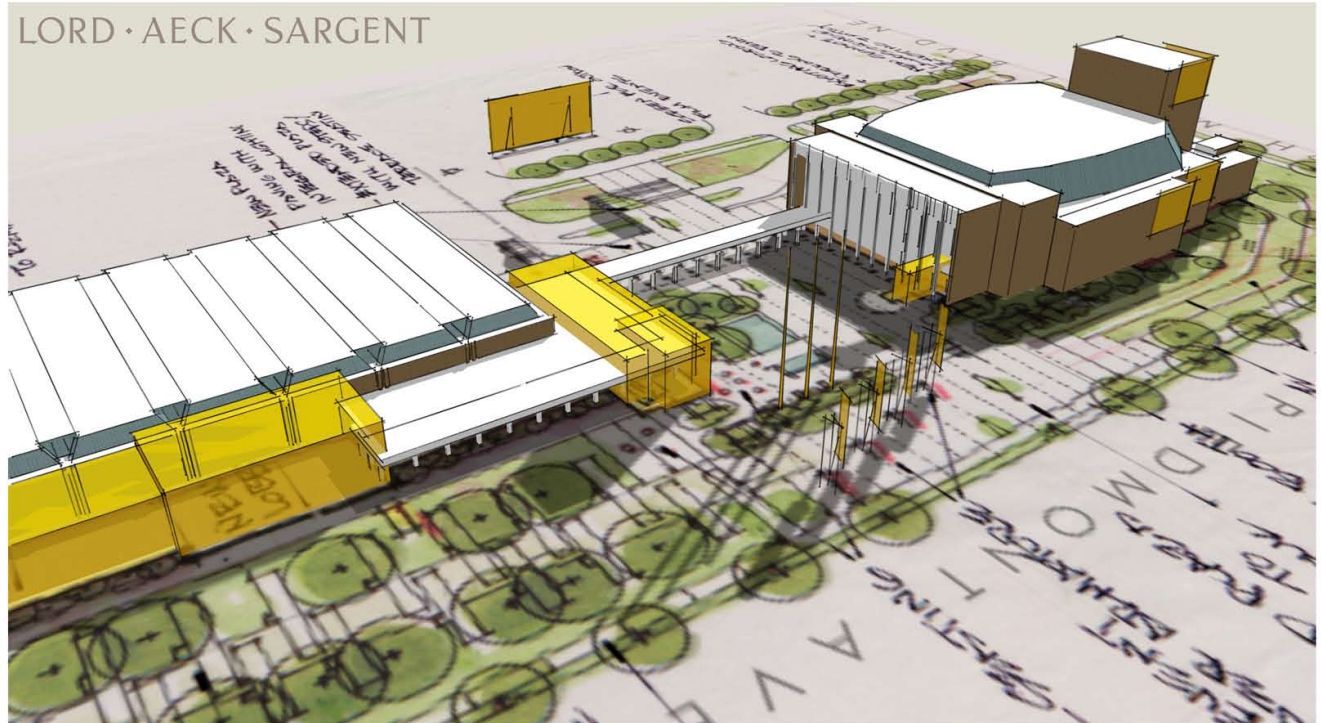


site photos EXISTING CONDITIONS

ATLANTA CIVIC CENTER FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

City of Atlanta • CAP/ABID
HR&A • LAS • Urban Collage



ATLANTA **CIVIC** CENTER FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

Appendix

Useful Terms (from the “Historic Zoning Ordinance” section of the briefing book)

Oglethorpe Plan Area

The original ward pattern of streets and lanes between Bay Street to the north, Gaston Street to the south, Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard to the west, and East Broad Street to the east.

Oglethorpe Plan Ward

A component of Oglethorpe's Plan for Savannah consisting of four Tything blocks (each containing ten Tything lots) and four Trust blocks around a central square, with blocks divided by a series of streets and lanes.

Tything Block

A component of Oglethorpe's Plan for Savannah. Tything blocks are located on the north and south sides of a square and usually consist of two rows of five 60- by 90-foot lots, subdivided by a lane.

Trust Block

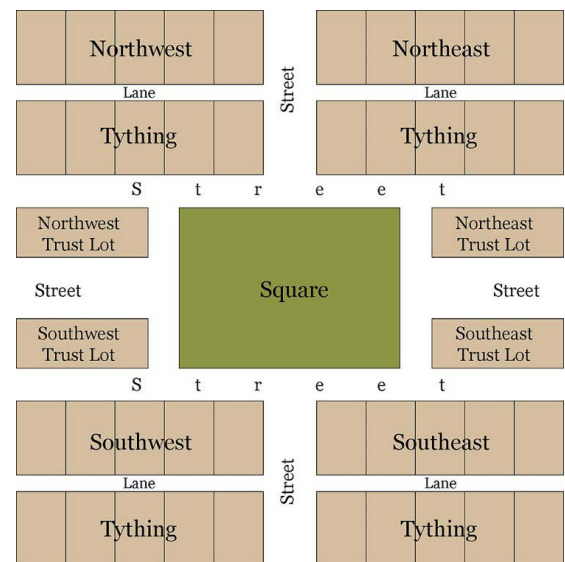
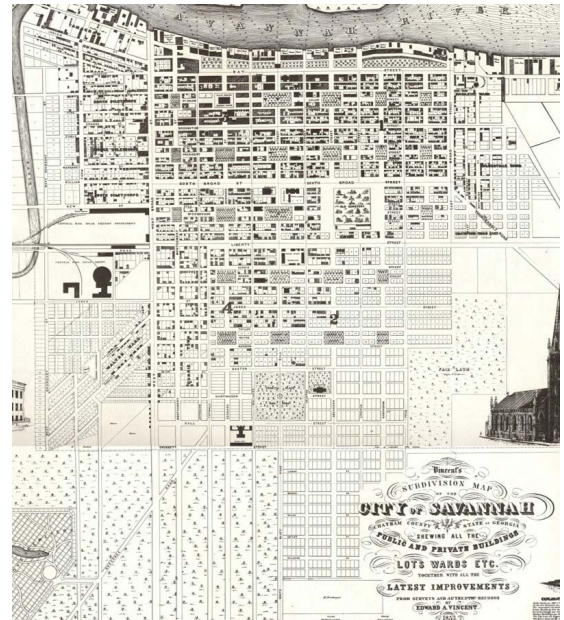
A component of Oglethorpe's Plan for Savannah. Trust blocks are located on the east and west sides of a square. There are four Trust blocks in each ward. (Added by panelists: Trust blocks were traditionally reserved for civic functions, such as churches, schools, meeting halls, etc.)

Lane

The service corridor subdividing a Tything block in Oglethorpe's original ward plan.

Trust Street

A component of Oglethorpe's Plan for Savannah. Trust streets are the streets that separate the Trust blocks.



Stakeholder Interview Participants

Available upon request through the City Manager's office.

Community Survey Results

Full survey results available at <http://savannahga.gov/2659/Future-of-The-Civic-Center> or upon request through the City Manager's office.

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ONE CITY. ONE DIRECTION: **FORWARD**

Panelist Biographies



Joe Alcock

Atlanta Office Director, McMillan Pazdan Smith

Joe has over 21 years of experience in challenging adaptive reuse, historic rehabilitation and urban infill projects across metro Atlanta. His focus on developing high-quality, environmentally efficient designs by integrating critical objectives has presented numerous satisfied clients with award-winning buildings. Joe consistently combines strong knowledge of planning regulations, building codes and zoning with his natural ability to find creative solutions.



Jennifer Ball

Vice President, Planning and Economic Development, Central Atlanta Progress

Jennifer directs land use and transportation planning efforts, economic development initiatives and implementation projects within Downtown Atlanta. Recent notable initiatives under her direction include the development of the Atlanta Arts & Entertainment District, the Atlanta Streetcar Development and Investment Guide; the Downtown Atlanta Master Plan; the Downtown Livability Code and Martin Luther King, Jr. Landmark District zoning regulation updates; and the on-going implementation of \$40 million worth of public space capital improvements including streetscape improvements, wayfinding signage and roadway upgrades. Jennifer has been named a member of the Atlanta Business Chronicle's "Up and Comers: 40 under 40" group of promising young leaders. She is a founding Executive Committee member of Sweet Auburn Works, Inc. She has served on the Georgia Tech Alumni Association Board of Trustees and is an active member of the Georgia Tech College of Design Affinity Group. Additionally, Jennifer is also a member of the Urban Land Institute as a founding member of the Atlanta District Council Young Leaders Group. Jennifer has been a guest lecturer at Georgia Tech's City and Regional Planning program and a presenter at national and local conferences on topics ranging from downtown economic development and business improvements districts to transportation planning and plan implementation. She has also authored an American Planning Association Planner's Advisory Service Report on Street Vending. Jennifer received a Bachelor of Science degree from the Georgia Institute of Technology College of Architecture and a Master of City Planning degree also from Georgia Tech.



George Banks

Partner, Revel

George is a twenty-year retail real estate veteran. With an extensive food + beverage and entertainment background, he has been involved as a principal and consultant in the development and operation of a number of notable destination retail projects in his career, including the Atlanta Dairies and award-winning Krog Street Market.

He is a graduate of the University of Virginia, and lives in Atlanta with his wife and two daughters.



Jennifer Fine

Vice President, Planning and Strategic Initiatives, Invest Atlanta

Jennifer C. Fine, AICP is the Vice President of Planning and Strategic Initiatives at Invest Atlanta, the official economic development authority for the City of Atlanta. In this position, she oversees the City's Tax Allocation Districts (TADs), which, to date, have provided gap financing for over \$7.0 billion in private development and investment.

Prior to serving in this role, Ms. Fine was the Economic Development Director for the City of East Point and the Executive Director for the East Point Business and Industrial Development

Authority, where she managed and directed the city's economic development strategies, including existing industry expansion services and recruitment of new business. During her tenure, she was responsible for completing projects that resulted in over \$1.2 billion in private sector investment, creating one million square feet of new development and over 1,000 new jobs to an underserved community.

Ms. Fine has been professionally involved in the community and economic development field for over 20 years, working primarily with local governments and regional agencies to advance innovative programs aimed at improving quality of life for area residents and businesses.

Ms. Fine serves on the Board of Directors of the ATL Airport Chamber of Commerce and is President of the Board of The Main Street Academy, a Fulton County K-8 public charter school in College Park, Georgia. She is an active member of the Urban Land Institute, the International Economic Development Council, the Council of Development Finance Agencies, the American Planning Association, and the Georgia Planning Association. She has been certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners since 2002.

Originally from Encinitas, California, Ms. Fine graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz (go Banana Slugs!) with a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Studies. She also holds a Master of Public Administration Degree from the University of Georgia.



Jonathan Gelber
Vice President, Bleakly Advisory Group

Jonathan Gelber has been a real estate and planning consultant with the Bleakly Advisory Group in Sandy Springs since 2008. He specializes in consulting for public and private clients in areas where real estate, public policy, and public finance overlap. Recently he has had the pleasure of working on the several major urban revitalization projects, including the Doraville GM site redevelopment, the long-term redevelopment of the Gwinnett Place area and several suburban town centers and MARTA transit-oriented development projects.

Prior to joining Bleakly, Jonathan was a Senior Planner for the City of Atlanta's Department of Planning and Community Development. He was responsible for managing long-range planning studies, economic development, and special projects. Before that he worked as an urban planning consultant in Atlanta and Portland, and as a transportation and transit planner with the City of New York and the State of North Carolina. He earned a Master's Degree in Real Estate from Georgia State University, a Master's Degree in Urban Planning from Columbia University, and a BA in Art History from Reed College. He is a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners.

Jonathan has also spent time working as a professional chef at restaurants in Portland, Atlanta and South Carolina. Born in Paris and raised in Los Angeles, Jonathan has lived in Atlanta since 2001, along with his wife, Molly, and two teenaged children.



Bob Hughes
President, HGOR

As a recognized leader in innovative and sustainable planning and design, Bob guides the planning and design efforts for HGOR. With over 37 years of industry experience, he works closely with clients to develop powerful ideas into resolute realities. Bob's demonstrated ability to understand and build consensus around a comprehensive vision has led the firm and its clients to receive over 75 professional awards for planning and design. His work on college campuses combines elements of planning and design to create frameworks and places, which enrich the institutions we serve.

Bob points to the diversity of projects and their subsequent challenges as to why he is excited to set foot in the HGOR office everyday.

"Each project brings its own set of separate challenges. It's thrilling to see if we can achieve what we set out to achieve for our clients," says Bob. "I love seeing HGOR develop ideas we strongly

believe in, then see each piece of the project come together. And at the end of the day – the project either is or it isn't."

Bob is a staunch believer in the firm's SEE philosophy (a focus on social, economic and environmental factors) that guides each project from idea to fruition.

"Since 1992, HGOR has approached each project through its SEE philosophy. We completely reinvented our culture and are now doing better work than ever," says Bob. "All parts of every project prioritize ROI, stewardship and how we are creating a great place for people. Fundamentally, we believe that's what makes us different."



David Scott

Senior Principal, Da Vinci Development Collaborative

Senior Principal of the DaVinci Development Collaborative, LLC, brings over 35 years of experience in Program, Design and Construction Management. David, who has a successful history leading major initiatives throughout the Southeast, was introduced to projects on a regional scale while an architectural student at Georgia Institute of Technology.

Recognizing and respecting David's technical knowledge, communication skills, and diplomatic style, he has earned a reputation with colleagues, industry leaders, and decision-makers for managing quality, containing costs, and producing results. Throughout his career, David has led the work of development teams on regionally significant initiatives, institutional programs, and real estate development initiatives from acquisition and planning to design and construction management.

Prior to joining DaVinci, David served as Senior Vice President, Director of Planning & Development, at Integral-Gude Program Management where he led the execution of key projects in the Southeast and downtown Atlanta. He also directed large public management projects including the Glynn County Public Schools and the Georgia Department of Transportation MMPT. With experience as an architect for 10 years, David is able to find the balance between brings a unique background to his role at DaVinci leading teams in the areas form, function, schedule and budget.

David holds a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and his roots are deeply imbedded in urban revitalization. He enjoys volunteering his time with various local civic groups and serves on the Board of Directors for the Council for Quality Growth.



Jay Silverman (moderator)

Chairman, TAPs Committee

Managing Principal, Dwell Design Studio

Jay Silverman has more than 20 years of experience working on a wide variety of project types including housing and mixed-use, retail, government, office, interiors, and single-family residential design in Atlanta and the southeastern United States. He is a Managing Principal with Dwell Design Studio.

Jay has a reputation for quality design of high-rise mixed-use towers and multi-building residential projects, as well as urban infill mixed-use developments, including new construction and the rehabilitation and adaptive use of older buildings. He takes pride in directing all phases of a project from master planning and schematic design through construction and completion, as well as finding creative solutions to complex design challenges associated with mixed-use and urban-infill development.

Jay currently serves as President of the Atlanta Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. He is active in the Urban Land Institute, and as a graduate of the ULI Center for Regional Leadership, has served as co-chair of the Technical Assistance Program Committee and the ULI Atlanta Housing Council.

Jay holds licenses to practice architecture in Tennessee and Georgia. He lives in Dunwoody with his wife and two sons. In his spare time he enjoys running and coaching his sons' soccer teams.

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