

A Comprehensive Revitalization Strategy:
THE SOUTH CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT PLAN
Chattanooga, Tennessee

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INTRODUCTION

“Chattanooga is embracing a new civic attitude – an attitude that says our government, our businesses, our industries, and all our citizens, are going to do all we can to...achieve economic growth and respect the resources that make growth possible.” Mayor Gene Roberts

Chattanooga is a city with a vision – a vision of becoming an Environmental City where ecological initiatives generate well-paying jobs, nurture social institutions, and create a sustainable community. This emphasis on sustainability is based on a recognition that the city’s economy, its social institutions, and the quality of its environment are closely intertwined. Without paying careful attention to each of these important elements, the decline of one has the potential to affect the vitality of the others. Experience in Chattanooga has shown that success comes with an integrated approach.

Sustainable community development has been an evolving strategy in Chattanooga for many years, although the term was not used until recently. Attention was first drawn to the need for dramatic environmental changes in 1969 when Chattanooga was named “the worst polluted city” in America. Since that time, concerted efforts by government, businesses, community organizations, and citizens have resulted not only in clean air attainment, but also what increasingly appears to be a comprehensive, interrelated, and strategic process for developing a sustainable community. Now, advocates for the environment and proponents of economic development, once at odds in Chattanooga, are beginning to work together for a better future.

Chattanooga has undergone many of the changes that cities across the country are facing. Suburban development since World War II drained the downtown area of much of its retail and almost all of its residential development. Downtown’s industrial base has also been eroded as manufacturing businesses have moved overseas, further limiting local job opportunities. Until recently, few residents thought of downtown as a place to go for entertainment or shopping, much less a safe place to live. Now, through the initiative of a broad base of community organizations, downtown Chattanooga is experiencing a renaissance. The new freshwater Aquarium, the Creative Discovery Museum, and the renovated Tivoli theater are educational and cultural resources for both residents and visitors; Warehouse Row also draws tourists to the area and reintroduces shopping downtown; the CARTA electric shuttle system provides a local transit route among downtown destinations, as well as local jobs since the shuttle buses are manufactured in Chattanooga; the Walnut Street Pedestrian Bridge and the Tennessee Riverpark connect the city with the river and provide a natural recreational amenity; and new riverfront housing has re-established a residential component that supports local businesses and night time activities. Each of these endeavors has played a part in bringing downtown Chattanooga back to life.

Yet despite these successes, there remain large areas of the central city that have not felt the positive effects of revitalization. The South Central Business District is one of these areas and is the focus of this study.

SETTING

Historically, Chattanooga's South Central Business District was characterized by a mix of industry and worker housing. Metal foundries, textile mills, and warehouses once dominated the area and provided the city's primary source of jobs. While many of these historic businesses are no longer operating, their wastes have left the legacy of soil contamination. Housing for factory workers was in the small community that used to be known as Rustville, a small neighborhood located on either side of Market Street south of Main Street. Its gridded street system was once home to small bungalows, parks, churches, and schools. Main and Market Streets traditionally served as the neighborhood's shopping street.

In recent decades, many of the industries have closed or moved away, leaving a landscape of abandoned factories, surface parking lots, and vacant storefronts. While a few new industrial businesses have moved to the area, such as a poultry processing plant and a carpet manufacturer, the dominant character of the South Central Business District is one of neglect. What is left of the housing stock has generally deteriorated to the point that many buildings are unsafe for habitation.

Despite the blighted condition of the district, the supporting infrastructure – streets, sidewalks, utilities, and buildings – remains. Recycling this existing land and infrastructure for new economically viable and ecologically responsible uses is the challenge facing this area. In this spirit, a number of proposals have recently come forward for development in the South Central Business District – expansion of the Trade Center, consolidation of TVA's facilities, construction of a new 30,000 seat football stadium, development of ecologically-oriented industries and an associated research institute, renovation of housing in the residential neighborhood, and expansion of the very successful Warehouse Row shopping complex. Each represents a project that stands on its own merits, yet without careful planning the sum total of these desires could detract, rather than enhance the over-all image of downtown.

Economic Outlook

The Chattanooga metropolitan area is in the middle of an aggressive economic development effort, which is unlike any undertaken in the past, in any region of the country. It is predicated upon:

- assisting in the expansion of current businesses (food processing, metal fabrication, insurance, etc.);
- developing an environmentally oriented business base (water quality and electric vehicles being the first two target businesses);
- visitors/conferences and conventions; and
- attracting “flexexecutives,” individuals and their companies which have the option of locating anywhere being drawn to urban amenities and quality of life.

In short, Chattanooga wants to become the environmental metropolis in the country.

The current business base of the region has served it very well until the past two decades. Since 1970, the manufacturing base of the economy began to shrink from 42% of the workforce to 22% in 1991. While service sector and wholesale and retail trade increased from 30% in 1970 to 46% in 1991, these new jobs were generally lower paying than the lost manufacturing jobs. The challenge for the region is not only to produce more jobs, but also to create better paying jobs.

During this same time period, the entire American economy has been transitioning from an industrial base to a “post industrial” or knowledge base. The high wage jobs of the knowledge-based economy demand different educational skills than the industrial economy, something that Chattanooga schools are not addressing sufficiently. Equally important, the knowledge-based economy rewards metropolitan areas, which have a clean environment and high quality of life; areas such as Raleigh-Durham, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C.

The economic development strategy for Chattanooga recognized these facts when a three-point plan was adopted to implement the strategy. These three points included:

- 1) improve the quality of the workforce, including education, training, and putting in place linkages between the education and business community;
- 2) develop sites for the new businesses, particularly for the target environmental businesses using abandoned sites which would be cleaned up; and
- 3) retain the existing business base by easing regulatory burdens, speeding up the permitting process and by improving communications.

The South Central Business District Plan begins to implement many of these strategies. This Plan addresses:

- creating a focal point for environmental businesses;
- expansion of the visitor business through the expansion of the Trade Center and the building of the stadium;
- expansion of the visitor business by continuing the rehabilitation of the Market Street District around the Choo-Choo;
- rehabilitating abandoned industrial sites while improving in-place infrastructure and facilitating bio-remediation of brownfield sites; and
- strengthening existing residential areas through infill and rehabilitation.

The implementation of the South Central Business District Plan is one of the critical steps in the overall Chattanooga Economic Development Strategy. It needs to have the highest priority from both the public and private sectors to accelerate the region into becoming a major player in the knowledge economy of the 21st Century.

The South Central Business District's proximity to downtown Chattanooga and UTC offer a unique opportunity. The South Central area is one of several inner city neighborhoods needing revitalization.

Process

Community involvement and participatory planning have been key factors in Chattanooga's ability to revitalize. In the original Vision 2000 project started in 1984, the entire community was invited to envision what they wanted the community to be. As civic pride increased, it propelled a metamorphosis that resulted in downtown and neighborhood revitalization, an innovative program for affordable housing, capital investments of over a billion dollars that have stimulated the economy and expanded the job base, and the development of much needed social and educational programs. In 1993, the community assessed its progress and conducted another community-wide visioning process, this time eliciting numerous environmental recommendations and a central goal of becoming a nationally recognized center for environmental improvement. By 1994, the community embraced the overarching theme of becoming a "sustainable community in which people choose to live, work, and raise their families."

An important emphasis of the South Central Business District Plan is to build on previous successes by including local residents, business people, property owners, and community leaders in the decision-making process. Because these decisions will affect this area's livability for many years, they must be made carefully and with considerable public input. Like most large and complex urban projects, developing a shared vision is critical to a plan's ultimate success.

Stakeholder Meeting

In September, 1994, a meeting was held with local residents, business representatives, and community leaders to initiate this South Central Business District planning process and to identify issues and concerns that should be addressed by the Plan. Common themes included:

- a desire for more pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use commercial areas and neighborhoods;
- an interest in revitalizing historic shopping streets by diversifying the mix of available retail shops and services and by bringing more housing downtown;
- an enthusiasm for innovative eco-industrial technologies and industries;
- on-going concerns about traffic and auto circulation, particularly with regards to making streets more pedestrian-friendly; and
- a concern about the need for entry-level housing that is affordable to young families.

Public Workshop

The second significant outreach effort of the South Central Business District Plan was a Public Workshop. Over 100 people participated in a one-day design workshop in October

1994. Participants developed rough concept plans, bringing both their familiarity with the site and their interest in the ultimate recommendations of the South Central Business District Plan. The workshop was also an opportunity to educate participants about the trade-offs inherent within site-specific planning and begin to resolve conflicts through collaboration and creativity. Leaders in urban design, economics, and ecologically-based technologies contributed their expertise.

At the conclusion of the working session, each team presented their design concept to the entire group for comments and critique. Seven plans were produced which demonstrated an enormous degree of consensus on the nature, scale, and quality of future development within the South Central Business District.

Common themes included:

- Providing a mix of job-generating, residential, and commercial uses within an urban fabric.
- Creating a pedestrian/bicycle greenway throughout the area that links this area with the rest of the city.
- Placing small neighborhood parks within residential areas.
- Protecting and enhancing walking connections to nearby neighborhoods.
- Using environmental conservation as a basis for recruiting new industries and businesses, as well as cleaning up toxic soil. The concept of renovating the Ross Meehan Foundry as an Ecology Center was also embraced.
- Reinvigorating declining shopping streets, such as Main Street and Market Street.
- Supporting the current trend toward loft-style housing and entertainment uses near the Choo-Choo.

At the workshop, teams of citizens worked together to develop rough concept plans for the area.

Each team was given an “Armature Plan” – an enhanced base map with streets, public spaces, natural features, and existing buildings that are likely to remain – and a series of to-scale land use “icons” which represent different types of uses that could be located within the study area. The size of the icons varied depending on the amount of land that is required to build at different densities or in increments that are consistent with conventional development patterns. In this way, the workshop participants began to understand the amount of land that must be available to accommodate them. The teams worked together to identify a range of appropriate land uses and then placed the land use icons on the base map to represent their preferred plan.

DESIGN CHARETTE

For the two days following the Public Workshop, a Design Charette was held to synthesize the concepts generated in the working sessions. Architects, urban designers, economists,

technical specialists, and innovative thinkers from around the country were brought together to develop a comprehensive strategy for revitalizing the South Central Business District (a list of Charette Team members is provided in the acknowledgements section). The result is the Plan presented here.

PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

The following principles and goals form the basis of the plan for the South Central Business District:

Connections

Circulation and infrastructure linkages should be established and enhanced both within the study area and outward to downtown, the University, College Hill Courts neighborhood, South Chattanooga, the M.L. King Blvd. District, and the river. These connections will be accomplished through extension of the CARTA shuttle route and potential long-term transit systems, greenway paths along underutilized railroad rights-of-way, and preservation and enhancement of walking streets. The goal is a human-scaled and interconnected pattern of streets, transit, and open spaces that weave these areas together.

Diversity

Key to the plan is a mix of uses, which will create a living downtown neighborhood, as well as a broad range of jobs. Diversity in housing translates into loft conversions, multi-family development, student housing, and small-lot single-family homes. Diversity in jobs translates into zero-emissions industry, incubator office space, high tech Research & Development sites, and Trade Center-related business. Diversity in services means local parks, transit, shared parking, and accessible retail and entertainment. Diversity helps to establish a high quality of life and ensures stable growth.

Diversity is a key concept for creating resilient economies and rich local culture.

Catalysts

Each sub-area within the plan has a catalyst, which sets the stage for “spin-off” of a least two other nearby projects. Properly designed and executed, the Trade Center expansion, the Stadium, and Warehouse Row Phase III each can and should cause spin-off development. A standard for consideration and support of any major development proposal should be the extent to which it “leverages” additional development opportunities.

Synergy

The fundamental uses and activities in an area should build on one another. Land uses should not be thought of in isolation from one another; rather, complementary relationships should be encouraged to enhance the opportunities for neighboring businesses. This synergy enhances the economic vitality of the whole area and makes more efficient use of land and resources. For example, an “urban ecology center” can treat outflow from the neighboring industries, create a unique tourist attraction, and provide the basis for spin-off water-quality related business. The stadium can provide regional identity, help clean up a decaying area, provide shared parking opportunities, and upgrade the local infrastructure and streets. Stadium parking should be configured in such a way that it ties in with and encourages investment in the surrounding area.

Urban Character

The historic urban pattern and character is what sets this area apart from other parts of the city and distinguishes this city from any other. The plan should build upon the area’s historic character, including its industrial legacy, and strive to “recycle” existing buildings whenever possible. The pedestrian-oriented environment and distinctive building fabric are what give this area an advantage over other locations. The scale, rhythm, and craftsmanship of many existing buildings cannot be replicated today and should be regarded as valuable resources that can attract additional investment into the area.

Public and Private Investment

Prudent public and private investment in the study area will be critical to its successful revitalization. Investment in enhancements of the public spaces and services will go a long way toward making this area an attractive location for desirable industries and visitor-serving businesses. Examples of further enhancement of important urban amenities include extension of the CARTA Shuttle, continuation of the streetscape improvements, acquisition of parcels to be set aside for civic parks, plazas, and recreation areas, and concerted efforts to integrate industries and waste treatment in ecologically sound ways.

THE DISTRICT PLAN

The South Central Business District Plan establishes an approach to urban revitalization that is grounded in the practical realities of market economics and development conventions, yet creates opportunities for innovation and visionary solutions. It takes the individual projects already proposed for the area and places them within a framework that is more than the sum of its parts. It rebuilds the area's job base by making Chattanooga a model Environmental City. It respects the historic street fabric and extends the CARTA shuttle system to make Chattanooga's core areas truly walkable and transit friendly. And, it draws upon the traditions and character of the city to once again bring residents and visitors downtown to shop, play, work, and live.

As shown in the following Land Use Map, the Plan calls for a variety of industrial, office, residential, and environmental uses to co-exist within the South Central Business District. In order to strategically take advantage of access opportunities, locational needs, and the quality of existing building stock, different clusters of similar uses will be created. For example, the Plan proposes that incubator office space, research institutes, and conferencing facilities be clustered around the Trade Center and TVA to take advantage of the activities already occurring here and their proximity to the heart of downtown. Similarly, the strategy for the historic district along Market and Main Streets calls for a mix of entertainment, shopping, and urban housing that preserves the existing buildings and expands on the success of Warehouse Row. Additional housing, both ownership and senior housing, is recommended in the old neighborhood west of Fort Negley, formerly known as Rustville.

A special site has been designated for "Eco-Industrial" uses. The intent is to create a "zero-emissions" zone where the wastes of one business become the fuel for another. The types of businesses that will be targeted for this area are those that provide well-paying, high quality manufacturing jobs along with a commitment to environmental quality. Several companies have already expressed an interest in such a site and the marketing approach builds on this demand. An "Ecology Center" is planned in conjunction with the Eco-Industrial zone which would serve a multitude of purposes, including cleaning contaminated soils, wastewater treatment through biological processes, incubator office space, and educational, research, and visitor facilities. A new community football stadium is also proposed in this same general area. To integrate this large facility into the urban fabric, the historic street grid has been re-introduced in the form of specially designed "parking streets." These parking streets will accommodate a majority of the parking needs for events at the stadium, can also provide parking for nearby industrial uses, and will be designed to allow water filtration and street trees.

Three overarching elements – streets, open space, and transit – tie this diverse mix of activities together to make a coherent and identifiable district. The street system respects the walkable scale of the historic downtown grid – new streets connect with the old. Street

trees, sidewalks, and human-scaled lighting should be required features of all streets. Open Space is incorporated throughout the area in the form of a pedestrian/bicycle greenway, urban parks, and an urban forest treatment of the surrounding freeway rights-of-way. And, transit is extended into the District, building on success of the CARTA shuttle.

The South Central Business District Plan will not happen overnight. It is a long-term program that must be flexible and responsive to changing markets and community desires. However, the vision presented here is just that, a vision. It serves to illustrate the potential of the area if incremental decisions are made within an overarching framework of principles and goals. The following sections provide much greater detail in terms of how to move toward that vision. The focus is on “catalyst projects” that can be implemented in the near term to jump start economic activity and reinvestment. With this beginning and through on-going dialogue, the South Central Business District has the potential to once again be a vital working part of Chattanooga.

Sub-Area Recommendations

The recommendations of the Plan are organized into a series of sub-areas. Clusters of similar land uses are proposed for each sub-area, along with catalyst projects that are designed to initiate change consistent with the Plan’s recommendations.

Catalyst Projects

Eco-Industrial Demonstration Project – A three block area has been identified as the most appropriate location for the first phase within the Eco-Industrial Zone. It contains both undeveloped land and existing buildings that could be easily retrofit for appropriate manufacturing and office uses. Its close proximity to the TVA offices, the Trade Center, Research and Development sites, and the potential Research Institute could generate a number of spin-off activities given its high visibility. The site’s adjacency to the Greenway is also seen as a distinct benefit.

Greenway – This linear open space system utilizes railroad rights-of-way that over time will be abandoned to create a landscaped pedestrian/bicycle connection to the UTC campus and the Tennessee Riverpark, a fiber optic cable connection between the high tech uses within the South Central Business District and the UTC campus, a biological stormwater drainage system, and the industrial waste piping system to the Ross Meehan Ecology Center. It also serves as a unifying element that establishes a “green” image to the District.

Stadium – The new football stadium will be a major development project within the study area, creating opportunities for spin-off activity. Specially designed “parking streets” will double as weekday parking for Eco-Industrial Zone and Incubator Office employees, a new park will provide recreation facilities for nearby residents of the study area and College Hill,

and commercial space along Main Street and within the stadium complex will also benefit both visitors and residents.

Ross Meehan Ecology Center – A variety of activities are planned in conjunction with the soil and water treatment functions of the Ecology Center, including a greenhouse, laboratory facility, incubator office space, education center, urban garden, and arboretum. These activities provide jobs for local residents, as well as an educational destination for visitors.

Trade Center Expansion – Phase One of the Trade Center’s expansion will extend the facility south across (and closing) 12th Street. Its “green” design will serve as a model of environmental responsibility and future trade shows and conferences will promote new sustainable development technologies. The expansion will also help frame a proposed park and plaza to be located at the northern terminus of the Greenway.

Historic District Rehabilitation – Existing architecturally significant buildings along both Market and Main Streets provide an excellent armature for creating a mixed-use district focusing on entertainment uses (such as night clubs, restaurants, theaters, and specialty shopping), visitor-serving uses (hotels and bed and breakfasts), and urban housing. While care must be taken to ensure that the area compliments, rather than competes, with the Riverfront/Aquarium district, it is an opportunity to create a “live-work” atmosphere in downtown. Two plazas are suggested as important outdoor civic spaces within this area and a vital link between two activity centers around Warehouse Row and around the Choo-Choo.

Main Street Anchor Tenant – A site at Main and Market Streets has been identified as a prime opportunity for soliciting a neighborhood-serving retailer that requires a space that is larger than can be provided in the rest of the existing Main Street fabric. Possible tenants include a small grocery or produce market, a drug store, a major bookstore, or a video store.

Market Street Senior Housing – At least one site along Market Street between 16th and 19th has been identified as a potential location for higher density senior housing. Such a project would not only bring more residents downtown, but would also allow the elderly to be within walking distance of shopping along Main Street and be within an inter-generational neighborhood.

Fort Negley Housing Development – The Fort Negley housing rehabilitation and construction project is sponsored by Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise. Every effort should be made by this plan to support their on-going efforts with the objective being an expansion of their activities into the Rustville neighborhood.

Eco-Industrial Zone

A key element of the South Central Business District Plan is the creation of a Zero Emissions “Eco-Industrial” Zone. This innovative strategy is intended to promote alliances between local industries by encouraging waste from one business to become “fuel” for another. Situated along Broad Street in the South Central Business District, this downtown industrial ecosystem will demonstrate the environmental benefits of limiting wastes and provide a model of sustainable development for other communities. Businesses that generate meaningful and well-paying employment for local residents will be targeted with the highest priority. This location also creates the opportunity to stimulate technology transfer from the nearby Incubator Office/Conferencing Zone, which will house incubator office space for small start-up environmental businesses, and the potential United Nations University Research Institute, which has expressed interest in locating here.

Redevelopment of the area will involve renovation of abandoned commercial structures, building on vacant lots, remediation of sites that are polluted with contaminated soil, and re-establishment of the historic street grid. The site will be anchored by businesses, which can contribute significantly to the economy and ecology of the community. One potential project is the redesign of elements of the Seaboard Farms plant into a more ecologically viable facility which when linked with other industries creates an “industrial ecology” where the waste of one industry becomes the raw material of another. A second potential project is a zero emissions soap factory, similar to a successful soap factory in Belgium where excess water from a nearby brewery is used in the manufacturing process for laundry soap. Ultimately, final wastes from businesses and toxic residues from former industries within the Eco-Industrial Zone will flow to and be treated by the Ross Meehan Ecology Center.

Three city blocks, which encompass approximately 8 acres, have been identified as a demonstration site to initiate and test the zero emissions concept. Located between Broad Street and the Greenway, from West 13th to the West 16th right-of-way, the demonstration site is primarily undeveloped, allowing initial construction of new manufacturing facilities and office space. Its proximity to the greenway will not only demonstrate the importance of pedestrian and bicycle access, but also means that the Greenway can be the route for efficient piping of industrial wastes to the Ecology Center. Its proximity to the Incubator Office/Conferencing Zone and the potential United Nations University Research Institute will act as a catalyst for recruiting new businesses for that zone, as well as facilitate transfer of ideas and new technology.

Once the demonstration project is underway, additional land dedicated to Eco-Industrial uses is identified immediately to the south along Broad Street and West 20th. These sites are comprised of smaller parcels with a mix of both architecturally significant and undistinguished buildings. A reserve area, designed to accommodate larger tenants and an expanded Eco-Industrial Zone, is located east of King Street along the Greenway.

Build-out of the Eco-Industrial Zone will likely take place over several years and, given the groundbreaking nature of the proposal, will necessitate innovative implementation tools, including:

- Creation of Zero Emissions development, design, and emissions standards for entire Eco-Industrial Zone.
- Acquisition of catalyst development site and recruitment of appropriate industries, locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Obtaining publicity through real estate development organization, e.g. Urban Land Institute, to increase interest on the part of ecologically-oriented developers.
- Negotiation of Development Agreements for waste sharing of nearby businesses.
- Study feasible connections to Ross Meehan Ecology Center.
- Establish procedures, designs, and funding programs for building east-west streets that re-establish the street grid.
- Study feasibility of rehabilitating existing industries into ecologically sound participants.

Ross Meehan Ecology Center

As a highly visible reminder of Chattanooga's industrial past, the skeleton of the Ross Meehan Foundry sits derelict at the southern approach to the city. The dilapidated shell of the once bustling building now sits vacant and neglected as a "brownfield" site, possessing all of the negative attributes of an abandoned industrial site. Recalling the sooty days of 1968, when Chattanooga began its recovery from a reputation for the worst air quality in America, this structure represents an opportunity for Chattanooga to invest in its future, while acknowledging its past.

The South Central Business District Plan calls for a dramatic renovation of the Ross Meehan structure, transforming the site from an abandoned brownfield into an Ecology Center for biological waste and soil treatment, as well as water purification. Using existing technologies involving microbes, bacteria, flora and fauna, the Center will become a model of environmental restoration and remediation. This "living machine" will be an autonomous, solar powered network that replicates natural aquatic eco-systems. A greenhouse, laboratory facility, incubator office space, education center, urban garden, and arboretum will be housed on site. No application could be better suited to complement the Tennessee Aquarium that anchors the north end of the city than a water treatment facility and education center at the southern end.

Galvanizing urban ecological activity, the Center will promote and demonstrate leading edge technologies in water purification, soil remediation, air quality improvement, tree propagation, urban food production, and environmental restoration. An impetus for an appropriate ecological infrastructure, the Center will encourage businesses to reduce their environmental

impact, while remaining economically competitive and providing a local example of urban mixed-use redevelopment. The Center will also remediate contaminated soil, demonstrating the efficacy of the Center's biological filtration systems and costing a fraction of that of conventional chemical treatment

Remodeled as an icon of the city's environmental agenda, the Ross Meehan Foundry will once again serve as a symbol of the city's prosperity. This lush greenhouse will be a verdant landmark, a benevolent neighbor, a celebration of the diversity of gardens, and an educational destination for visitors and citizens. Enveloped in glass, planted with trees, and teeming with biological activity, the structure will embody the promise for environmental restoration with a nod to its industrial past.

Getting this innovative project off the ground in early phases of the Implementation Program for the Plan will be critical. In particular, establishing a degree of certainty regarding the future of the Ross Meehan Foundry is essential information for the Stadium planners, as well as potential tenants within the Eco-Industrial Zone. Thus, the following next steps are suggested:

- Prepare a Design and Feasibility Study that evaluates the potential to take the Ross Meehan Foundry and renovate it into an Ecology Center. This study should address both the technical workings and physical design of such as facility, as well as possible on-site activities and tenants.
- Prepare Cost Estimates for land purchase, development, and on-going operations.
- Identify Potential Funding Sources, both public and private.
- Educate and Build Consensus among local community groups, public agencies, decision-makers, and prospective tenants of the Eco-Industrial Zone.
- Plan Pilot Project.

The Ross Meehan Ecology Center will be a model of environmental restoration and remediation. This "living machine" will be an autonomous, solar powered network that replicates natural aquatic ecosystems. A greenhouse, laboratory facility, incubator office space, education center, urban garden, and arboretum will be housed on site.

The Ross Meehan Foundry will be rehabilitated to serve as the central greenhouse and visitor's center.

Stadium Sub-Area

A new community football stadium is proposed in the heart of the South Central Business District between 17th and 20th streets, adjacent to the Ross Meehan Ecology Center and accessible via the Greenway. The 30,000-35,000 seat facility will become a major landmark within the District, representing a visitor destination and an opportunity to create "spin-off" uses and activities.

The appropriate location and configuration of the football stadium and its associated parking has been a subject of much discussion during the past months. Typically, most stadiums of the size contemplated here are located either on a college campus or at the periphery of the community, since few cities have downtown locations large enough to accommodate the structure and the necessary surface parking. However, in Chattanooga, conditions in the South Central Business District are favorable for major redevelopment. Given the amount of underutilized and brownfield sites, it was suggested that a downtown football stadium would provide a number of distinct advantages in terms of bringing event patrons downtown, recovering a large amount of currently unused land, and taking advantage of the area's good access from I-24, US-27, and the CARTA shuttle system.

Despite these advantages, challenges emerge when the structure and its associated parking needs are placed within the traditional fine grain scale of downtown and the South Central Business District. For example, the stadium itself will close through traffic on six city blocks and with the necessary 1,600 parking spaces (if placed solely in surface parking lots) the total amount of land is over 35 acres. A single project of this size would consume a majority of the study area, leaving few sites for the other types of uses that are envisioned. It would also destroy the very qualities that make the area attractive for reuse and rehabilitation: its fine-grain fabric and pedestrian scale.

Through close coordination between the South Central Business District Team and the Stadium Designers, a Plan has evolved which strikes a careful balance between pragmatic planning for the stadium and preservation of the scale and traditional character of the area. Key recommendations of this plan are shown in the attached illustrative drawing and include:

- Preserving the traditional asset grid wherever possible and introducing new streets along existing railroad rights-of-way.
- Placing a portion of the parking for the stadium along specially designed “parking streets” that provide high capacity parking for major events. This strategy eliminates some of the large land requirements for surface parking. Surface parking for season ticket holders and VIPs is still provided within lots to the north and south of the stadium.

Special “parking streets” provide parking for stadium events and year-round parking for Eco-Industrial uses.

20th Street would receive a “boulevard” treatment.

- Creating a public park extending from Main Street to the primary stadium entry that provides a gathering space for pre-game activities and a year-round recreation space for nearby residents. Surface parking lots will be planted as “parking orchards” – visual and ecological complements to the park and Greenway.
- Bringing the Greenway directly adjacent to the stadium, encouraging students and neighbors

- to bike or walk to events.
- Providing retail frontage along Main Street, in front of the stadium along 17th Street, and along 20th Street that can create a mixed-use atmosphere and reinforce the street edge along these critical walking connections. A re-use plan should also be prepared for the historic power plant.
 - Using the existing capacity of freeway ramps to the best advantage, minimizing the need for improvements to Main Street that may impede pedestrian movement from the College Hill neighborhood.
 - Employing design elements, which have been proven successful by recent urban stadiums in other cities across the country.
 - Continuing to study the feasibility of using the stadium for other sports or events.

Incubator Office/Conferencing Zone

At the juncture between downtown and the study area, new incubator offices, research and development facilities, an eco-industrial research institute, and conferencing facilities will create the “intellectual engine” that drives the creation of new ecologically sensitive manufacturing technologies. The Plan proposes that these new uses be clustered around the Trade Center and TVA to take advantage of the activities already occurring here and their proximity to the heart of downtown. Ultimately, a critical mass of enterprises and a diversity of settings will engender a lively campus atmosphere, where new ideas are born in cafes, developed in workshops designed specifically for new start-up businesses, manufactured in the Eco-Industrial Zone, and displayed and sold at the Trade Center.

A key strategy for this area is to provide flexible spaces that allow start-up companies to transform themselves quickly and engage easily in consulting, research, or even manufacturing. This will allow businesses to remain in the area as they grow. Teleconferencing centers, training facilities, and administrative support services will also be important ancillary uses. A Research Institute, potentially sponsored by the United Nations University, would also complement the mix of expected users and draw specialists from around the world.

The Chattanooga Trade Center is one of the primary uses within this area and currently is very successful in bringing major exhibitions to the city. In the long term, they see themselves as a significant play in communicating and fostering Chattanooga’s “knowledge-based” economy and its environmental aspirations. The Trade Center’s immediate expansion plans call for extending their building south across (and closing) 12th Street. The new structure is envisioned as a model of environmental responsibility – solar design, “green” building materials, and a biological wastewater treatment system will allow the facility to demonstrate the feasibility of “zero emissions design.” Future trade shows and conferences will focus on promoting the technologies targeted by the Chattanooga Economic Development Strategy: water quality, electric vehicles, and zero-emissions manufacturing. The Trade Center has also acquired property further to the south, extending to 14th Street, for

a second future expansion. The South Central Business District Plan acknowledges and accommodates these expansion plans with a continued connection on 13th Street.

As envisioned, development in this area will maintain and rehab significant buildings to the greatest extent possible, and infill vacant parcels with new low-rise buildings that reinforce the street edge. Special design standards will need to be created for the area that establishes ground rules for new and renovated structures. Existing streets that re-establish the traditional street grid will be constructed. These new streets will be designed as high capacity “parking streets,” like those proposed in and around the stadium. The Greenway will extend into the area, providing a recreation amenity, a pedestrian/bicycle connection, and a potential fiber optic connection to UTC and the Eco-Industrial areas.

Entertainment/Live-Work District

A formal urban park is placed along 12th Street that would create an amenity for the TVA, Trade Center, and a possible Research Institute, as well as act as the northern terminus of the Greenway and a focus for new environmental awareness. Like Miller Park, this civic space should be designed to be both visually pleasing and a place for outdoor activities, exhibits, and events in conjunction with Trade Center conventions. Ground floor retail, restaurants, and cafes would help enliven this space. Its implementation would require coordination with TVA and thorough study of the agency’s long-term facility needs.

The existing significant buildings along both Market and Main Streets provide an excellent armature for creating a mixed-use district focusing on entertainment uses (such as night clubs, restaurants, theaters, and specialty shopping), visitor-serving uses (hotels and bed and breakfasts), and urban housing. While care must be taken to ensure that the uses within this area complement, rather than compete, with the Riverfront/Aquarium district, it is an opportunity to create a “live-work” atmosphere in downtown and support the already successful Choo-Choo hotel/conferencing.

Perhaps the most important recommendation for this area is to preserve and rehabilitate the existing building stock. It is the character of these buildings that creates a special atmosphere, unique within downtown Chattanooga. This character will be the primary reason that “urban pioneers” will want to live in the area. It will also serve as the impetus for nightclubs, galleries, and boutiques to see an advantage to locating here instead of other more central locations. The rehab work already accomplished in the 1200 block of Market Street and the corner of Cowart and 14th Streets provides a perfect example of the successful ways the area’s character can be retained and recaptured.

Loft-style apartments are particularly appropriate for buildings west of Market and south of 14th Street. Here, employees of nearby offices would be within a short walk of work and UTC students would be within a short bicycle ride for campus via the Greenway. These new

residents would also establish a “built-in” market for businesses and restaurants in the area. Two major retail proposals have already been suggested for this area that fit well with the notion of creating a specialty shopping area. The very successful Warehouse Row is planning an expansion south along Market Street and into this area. This project’s proven ability to bring shoppers into downtown and the South Central Business District will be an important catalyst if the quality and the historic character of the building fabric is retained. Similarly, a proposed Designer Showroom Center in rehabilitated freight terminal buildings east of Market will draw on untapped market demand and potentially create opportunities for related spin-off activities.

Three public plazas have been recommended as catalyst projects for this sub-area. Each would serve as identifying features and gateway elements and include benches, public areas, retail kiosks, and special monuments. Two plazas are suggested for sites on either side of Market Street, where the Greenway passes through the area. One of these would be within a public park that creates a public open space. A third plaza is located at the intersection of Main and Market to clearly mark the juncture between the Entertainment/Live-Work District and the Main Street shopping area.

In order to facilitate renovation, the following steps are recommended:

- Retail all existing built form – this is the primary memory of the Chattanooga’s past that can be used to bring form to the future. Criteria should be established and a survey undertaken which catalogues the status of buildings within the sub-area. Mechanisms encouraging the rehabilitations of significant buildings should be identified, such as loan guarantees or design assistance.
- Encourage ground floor retail in buildings along Market, Main, and Williams Streets, as well as facing the Greenway and Park. Work with the proponents of Warehouse Row expansion and the proposed Designer Showroom Center to ensure compatibility with this Plan’s recommendations.
- Develop a plan for shared parking within this sub-area. Since many parcels do not have sufficient on-site parking, several currently undeveloped sites are recommended as appropriate locations for surface parking lots that could be jointly used by tenants and visitors. In most cases these sites cross property boundaries, thus special long term use agreements will be necessary.

Rustville Residential Neighborhood

The Rustville Residential Neighborhood provides a special opportunity to re-make a sense of place out of eroded urban fabric. Historically a separate town, Rustville ultimately became a part of Chattanooga. Many of the features that created an identity for Rustville, however, remain today. Tree-lined streets that are scaled to pedestrians and form a pleasing walking environment; lotting patterns that reflect the original bungalow housing stock; and a few

remaining homes that generously face streets with porches and fine detailing. These historic features create the opportunities for revitalization that this Plan's recommendations are based upon.

Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise has successfully revitalized the Fort Negley neighborhood. A similar approach is suggested for Rustville.

The primary recommendation of this plan is to retain and expand the residential orientation of this neighborhood. Existing vacant single-family lots should be infilled with new, compatible single-family housing. Along these lines, the successful efforts of Chattanooga Neighborhood Enterprise in the Fort Negley neighborhood should be considered a model of appropriate revitalization and, if possible, should be expanded into the Rustville Neighborhood. Market Street itself provides an opportunity for higher density housing within the neighborhood, yet at a scale that is compatible with the surrounding fabric. Over time, as existing service commercial uses along Market Street close, they should be converted to housing opportunity sites. The blocks along the west side of Market Street may even provide a more immediate opportunity for multi-family or senior housing. Providing housing for a diversity of households, young and old, will help keep the neighborhood active and socially healthy.

Several park sites are placed within the neighborhood to provide play areas for small children, as well as daycare, within convenient walking distance of most homes. A site for a new community center has also been suggested at the corner of Market and 17th Streets. These urban amenities, along with a strong sense of community, are the type of features that will entice families to move downtown.

Main Street has always been the traditional shopping street for the Rustville Neighborhood. The South Central Business District Plan calls for a rehabilitation effort along Main, much like the one already in process along Martin Luther King. Neighborhood-serving retail and services should be targeted for ground floor spaces in buildings that face Main Street. One specific site, located at the southwest corner of Main and Market provides a special opportunity for a larger tenant, such as a drug store, small grocery, bookstore, or video shop.

Main Street should be a pedestrian shopping street. Street trees and sidewalk improvements will help create a pleasant walking environment and slow traffic.

Open Space Framework

Central to the notion of a “sustainable community” is the integration of urban and natural elements. The open space framework of the South Central Business District Plan is comprised of three main components:

Greenway – Existing railroad rights-of-way are converted to a walking and bicycling trail connection that links the South Central Business District with Southside neighborhoods, Downtown, the M.L. King neighborhood, UTC, the Erlanger Medical Complex, and ultimately to the Tennessee Riverpark beyond. This linear element also doubles as an ecological stormwater drainage system and provides the opportunity to incorporate fiber optic technology and piped industrial waste.

The Greenway reuses former railroad rights-of-way to provide bicycle and pedestrian connections to UTC and the Tennessee Riverpark.

The Greenway can also provide environmental benefits. Storm drainage can take place in natural swales. Piping of industrial wastes and fiber optic cables can also use the right-of-way.

Parks – Small urban parks are suggested in each of the Plan’s sub-areas to provide public gathering, exhibition, and recreation spaces. A formal urban park is placed along 12th Street that would create an amenity for the TVA, Trade Center, and a possible Research Institute, as well as act as the northern terminus of the greenway. Like Miller Park, this civic space should be designed to be both visually pleasing and a place for outdoor activities and events in conjunction with Trade Center conventions. A second urban park is proposed in conjunction with the stadium. This space could be designed to accommodate a variety of activities including play areas, BBQ facilities, and grassy lawn. At least two neighborhood parks are recommended for the residential portions of the area, which would provide play areas for small children, as well as daycare facilities. Urban plazas are suggested for strategic locations and entry points within the Entertainment/Live-Work Districts.

Urban Forest – The I-24 and US-27 freeway corridors contain an enormous amount of undeveloped and underutilized land, which in their current condition, make a rather undistinguished entry to downtown. This Plan considers the land within the freeway rights-of-way as a resource. It suggests that the lands at the edge of the freeway and within the off-ramps should be used to create an “Urban Forest” where a diversity of tree species would be grown to either screen the freeway or to be replanted within the study area as street trees. The Chamber of Commerce’s Area Beautification Committee has already been active in beginning improvements to the gateways with tree plantings to screen or direct views. This plan would greatly intensify the plantings so as to literally create a working nursery for the city. A second important element of the Urban Forest is its connection to the “Ecology Center.” Trees planted on the former Ross Meehan site would work to naturally cleanse the soil and

treat wastewater. As the Ecology Center matures, it could become an arboretum specializing in trees that are native to the Chattanooga region.

Transit System

The CARTA shuttle system is an important and very successful component of the renaissance of downtown Chattanooga. The South Central Business District Plan builds on the success of the system and calls for its expansion in the long term. Clearly, frequent and accessible transit to the area is consistent with the environmental goals of the project and will be an amenity that can only help entice new businesses to locate here. Transit can also help bring workers to their jobs, reduce the need for parking, and allow visitors to park only once while they spend the day at the Aquarium, Warehouse Row, the Stadium, and the Ecology Center.

As shown in the attached diagram, extending CARTA into the South Central Business District can be accomplished with simple additions to the current system. Once the Plan is underway, close collaboration with CARTA officials should begin and lead to more detailed studies of actual route.

The CARTA Shuttle will link the South Central Business District with major destinations throughout the city, including downtown, the CARTA Shuttle Center, the Aquarium/Riverfront area, local shopping districts, and recreation opportunities.

Strategic Next Steps

The South Central Business District Plan is a long-term program that will be implemented over time, adjusting along the way to changing markets and community desires. While initial phases may seem pioneering, once several of the catalyst projects are implemented, momentum and enthusiasm will grow. This has been the experience of the Downtown revitalization and development of the Riverfront/Aquarium District; lessons learned from these efforts should and will be applied here.

Beginning the implementation process will require a combination of strategic decision-making and consensus building. The first step should be an “implementation strategy session.” This 2-3 day intensive workshop should bring together key stakeholders, experts from this effort, as well as representatives of River Valley partners and local decision-makers.

Overall Implementation Concepts:

- Infrastructure Construction, Phasing and Financing Plan – This study should take a broad look at the feasibility of using existing infrastructure within the study area (water, sewer, streets), as well as plan for future improvements, identify costs, and recommend appropriate financing mechanisms.
- Brownfield Survey – A site-specific assessment of Brownfield sites within the entire study area should be undertaken. Recommendations for appropriate clean-up processes should be made. This exercise should include legal/legislative professionals to assist with identification of new environmental policies and establishment of a strategy for obtaining grants, waivers, and special designations.
- Zoning and Policy Amendments – Given the innovative nature of the Plan’s recommendations, new zoning codes and City policies will be needed to ensure that the intent of the Plan is carried forward over time.
- Design Guidelines and Standards – Much of the quality and character of the sub-areas will depend on the design and configuration of buildings, streets, and public spaces. Special Design Guidelines and Standards should be prepared for each of the sub-areas so that future developers clearly understand the physical form and program suggested by this Plan.
- Significant Building Survey – Since the Plan recommends that buildings be preserved to the greatest extent possible, criteria should be established and a survey undertaken which catalogues the status of all buildings within the study area. Mechanisms encouraging the rehabilitation of significant buildings should be identified, such as loan guarantees or design assistance.

- Street Improvement Program – A limited number of streets within the area will require special design treatment. A coordinated program for design and construction of Market, Broad, Main and 20th Streets, as well as the “parking streets” should be prepared.
- Open Space Implementation Plan – A special effort should be made to investigate the steps necessary to implement the Greenway, including the negotiations with the railroad companies, identification of land acquisition and development costs, phasing, and corridor design. Similar efforts should be made for the Urban Forest, such as negotiations with the Department of Transportation for use of excess rights-of-way and preparation of a tree propagation plan. Additional steps should be taken to assign responsibility for implementation of the urban parks and plazas, as well as identification of potential funding sources for all open space elements at the Federal, State, and local levels.

Sub-Area Implementation Concepts:

- Eco-Industrial Zone – Critical first steps include: defining standards for waste sharing and zero emissions design, identifying and purchasing a demonstration project site, studying feasible connections to the Ecology Center, and soliciting and coordination appropriate industries.
- Ross Meehan Ecology Center – Feasibility studies are needed that address the technical working and physical design of such as facility, estimate capital and operating cost, and identify potential funding sources. A parallel education and consensus building effort should also be undertaken.
- Stadium – On-going efforts should be made to coordinate with the stadium architects to ensure consistency with the recommendations of this plan. One element of these efforts should be an evaluation of the project’s impacts on nearby freeway interchanges and a plan for balancing auto and pedestrian access. Once the design is finalized, on-going efforts may be needed to facilitate any necessary land swaps and assist with the design and construction of parking streets, the park, plazas, and special retail buildings.
- Incubator Office / Conferencing Zone – Recruit appropriate companies and organizations and provide a program of incentives. Coordinate with TVA to ensure implementation of the new park and renovation of ground floor spaces to provide small retail shops along the park.
- Entertainment / Live-Work Districts – A Specific Area Plan should be prepared for this area which establishes building renovation design standards, programs for shared parking, an appropriate mix of tenants that doesn’t compete with other areas of the city, financing programs for building renovation and construction of public improvements.
- Rustville Residential Neighborhood – Aggressively recruit a developer for senior housing along Market Street. Also recruit a developer and tenant for a major anchor store at the corner of Main and Market. Expand the Fort Negley residential program to incorporate the Rustville Residential Neighborhood.

While these steps are merely a starting point, they show that with a few strategic efforts the South Central Business District can be on its way to a true renaissance – a renaissance that propels Chattanooga into the 21st century.

Imagine living next door to industrial sites in the center of a city without concern for contaminants. Imagine being able to easily walk or take public transportation to work, shopping and recreation areas. Imagine that the waste generated by your business is integrated into a “closed loop” system and is filtered by a solar aquatic treatment plant using biological remediation. This is possible – today!

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