

2014 YOUNG GAMECHANGERS FINAL PROPOSALS

Dublin and Laurens County





The Heart of Dublin Proposal - How can downtown Dublin better attract and retain merchants while investing in the surrounding neighborhoods to extend downtown's vitality?

Section 1

The Gateway Gang Proposal - How might Laurens County improve its community gateways and signage while creating an appealing brand?

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Section 3

GROUP 1

Heart of Dublin

How can Dublin better attract and retain merchants while investing in the surrounding neighborhoods to extend downtown's vitality?





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Heart of Dublin

Executive Summary

Riding on the success of Downtown Dublin's local merchants, the Farmers Market and the recently completed Bicentennial Park, the community of Dublin-Laurens County commissioned Georgia Forward's Young Gamechangers to explore new potential development opportunities and define projects that enhance the downtown area. This proposal identifies opportunities for recreation, business and new housing within downtown and methods for improving the pedestrian environment connecting downtown to existing neighborhoods.

As downtowns across the country continue to evolve into premiere destinations, the importance of neighborhoods cannot be overlooked. Downtown living opportunities can reduce sprawl and improve the city's tax base. Downtown residents create a built-in market for downtown businesses, reinforcing investments already in the district.

Recommendations in the proposal strive to preserve and enhance Dublin's existing assets and provide additional amenities for its current residents. The proposal also explores the potential for improved economic and social vitality of the downtown through new housing and mixed-use developments. The concepts found in the proposal reflect the ideas and objectives determined by Georgia Forward Young Gamechangers and the local representatives and is crafted to appeal to a wide variety of developers.

The plan sets a path for public and private investment and supports the following goals:

- Stimulate economic development in the downtown.
- Create a dynamic environment for people to live and work.
- Provide a unique, exciting and urban living community.
- Continue efforts to create a successful business environment for merchants in downtown.
- Protect existing amenities in the downtown area.
- Provide transportation that does not sacrifice the quality of a pleasant walkable environment.

Dublin's downtown area has undergone significant changes throughout the last 100 years. Currently, the downtown stands at a crossroads, with key choices to be made that will guide it through future decades. Implementation will be gradual, through incremental steps, driven by both public capital investment and private development and often through collaboration or partnership of the public and private sectors. The future of downtown expansion and revitalization can only be achieved by a public-private partnership. To protect the investment made by public-private partnerships, the proposal recommends the improvement of existing segments of downtown including continued streetscape enhancements, mixed-use infill development and realigned roadway networks that promote a walkable district.

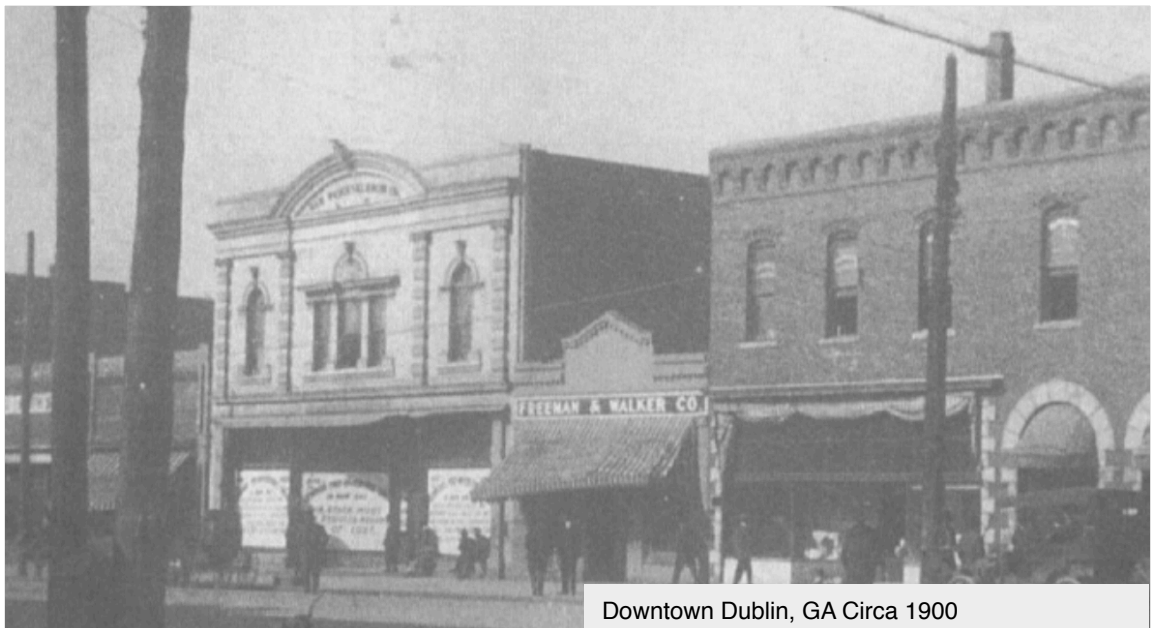
Once implemented, the plan will guide future growth in the downtown. It will ensure that the downtown continues to evolve into an exciting district featuring entertainment, culture, recreational opportunities, places of business and residential neighborhoods while preserving its historic charm. This proposal is the first step to a plan for an evolving downtown that will become an asset to the city of Dublin for generations to come.

Background/Introduction

There has been a recent migration in U.S. cities towards the downtown districts within cities and towns. Many downtowns across the south are growing and facing the challenge to revitalize their downtowns to meet this demand. Downtown districts are often the oldest sections of cities, because downtown is where the business and commerce was first established. Therefore, the neighborhoods surrounding the downtown also tend to be the longest tenured.

Our question is two-fold and we chose to address each part in a conjunctive manner. Meaning that by investing in the neighborhoods surrounding Downtown Dublin, Dublin can better attract and retain merchants. Improving the neighborhoods that surround downtown will increase the number of patrons in the downtown area and also help reduce the crime rate in Dublin, in turn helping Dublin retain merchants. Increasing the merchant retention rate and sustaining business is the first step in recruiting new merchants to Downtown.

Over the past 25 years, Dublin's population has remained relatively constant, with just over a 2% increase in the past 10 years. Therefore, Downtown Dublin is going to have to find new ways to market itself to the people that already reside in Dublin, while still looking for ways to attract visitors or travelers passing by.



Downtown Dublin, GA Circa 1900

Big Idea 1: *Dublin River Walk*

Recommendation: Design and construct a River Walk, along the Oconee River.

Downtown Dublin has an untapped resource in the Oconee River, just a few blocks down US 80. Many of the successful, growing cities in Georgia have incorporated a water feature into their downtowns in some form or fashion. Augusta, Columbus, Milledgeville, and Macon all utilize the river near or in their cities as a public attraction. The cool breeze from the Oconee River will provide the perfect place for residents and visitors of Dublin to engage in a variety of activities, from jogging or exercising to relaxing and enjoying the great outdoors.

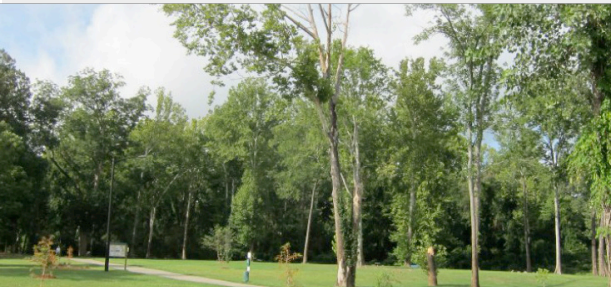
Here are several other Georgia cities' River Walks or attractions.



Augusta, GA River Walk



Columbus, GA



Oconee River Greenway



Ocmulgee Heritage Trail





Existing Dublin Riverwalk



Riverwalk Expansion Site

Several years ago, Dublin created plans to construct a river walk, but the plans were premature and without true vision and leadership. With many examples of other communities successfully developing a “riverwalk,” and positive feedback from local leaders, we believe that now is the time to make this vision a reality. With the Young Gamechangers to support the effort, as well as assistance from other organizations involved in this program, like Georgia Municipal Association, and the Carl Vinson institute, this idea can succeed.

We recommend a greater scheme for integrating downtown to nature and recreation. Revisiting the idea conceptually keeping in mind the investments already made in downtown Dublin is important. The river is a path to connect not only nature and downtown living, but also segmented cultures and populations of the Dublin community. Public parks located in current vacant industrial areas for green space, streetscape upgrades, and walkable trails to existing, beautified areas are part of our vision. All of these elements will invite visitors to tour the entire downtown area, by portraying a uniformed im

The allure of this idea is a preface to subsequent ideas presented in our proposal. We are asking you to think twenty years ahead to a downtown Dublin containing a mixed-use community center surrounded by walkable beauty with friendly travelers and young families. We believe connectivity and friendliness are Dublin’s current strengths to be exponentially expounded upon.

Scope of the Initiative

The theory behind this type of a plan is simple. People and businesses want to locate next to, or in a nice new revitalized building or area. Selecting several target areas within Downtown allows the Governments and other revitalization groups to focus on key areas and maximize funding and investment in those areas. This in turn encourages private investors and developers to invest in properties located near these target areas causing a “ripple effect”.

Ongoing activation of the space can include water sports, outdoor recreational activities, walking and biking trails, etc. Seasonal activities can range from summer concerts, fall festivals, holiday-lit trails, and spring gardening classes. Revenue generation can be created from amphitheater rental, vendor licenses, sports equipment rental and even trail landscaping sponsorships.

A critical component of this River Walk would be the connection between the current downtown district and the River Walk area, approximately 0.7 miles. This connection will be made with implementing a streetscape plan including a bike path and/or shared pedestrian path that includes safety lighting and a tree canopy.



Big Idea 2: *Mixed-Use Community Center*

One of the best ways to retain merchants in any area, not just a Downtown is to simply increase the customer base. One way to do that is by creating an attraction in Downtown Dublin that will draw in new people. We feel this can be accomplished through a mixed-use meeting space. Dublin is centrally located in the State of Georgia making Dublin a great location to hold conventions, seminars, tradeshow, and conferences. All of which would bring large crowds of new “customers” to the City of Dublin. A successful mixed-use center in Downtown Dublin might also help create an incentive and demand for a hotel to locate in Downtown Dublin, instead of locating on I-16.

We suggest consideration of the old Grocery Store building along US 80 located at 120 North Jefferson Street as a location for the mixed-use center. A second suggestion is to build a new mixed-use center in the area close to where the new riverwalk area would be located somewhere on East Madison Street between South Washington Street and the River. Placing the new mixed-use town center building would create a connection between the Riverwalk area and downtown Dublin and would further substantiate the ability to draw patrons into the downtown area.

A central center in either location will help spread the revitalization “ripple effect” from the Farmers Market area through Downtown and eventually to the River Walk. Attached are two maps of downtown Dublin, the first being the Jefferson Street grocery store property and the second being potential areas along East Madison Street between downtown and the Oconee River.



Jefferson Street Grocery Location Suggestion 1



Jefferson Street Grocery Location Suggestion 2

Scope of the Initiative

Blighted properties that cannot be re-tenanted with department/grocery stores or shops are being converted into churches, office buildings, light-industrial, government buildings, town centers, parks and transit centers providing the opportunity to create a very valuable space, in a very valuable real estate in the center of town where it is getting into a deteriorated state and turn that around at a cost savings.

Local communities in all 50 states are facing declining retail sales tax revenue and derelict properties along commercial arterials. The challenge of planning and implementing the revitalization of these troubled shopping center properties is shared by multiple stake-holders – not only property owners, but also mayors and other civic leaders play a significant role in turning a property around. The policy and funding decisions made by the host municipality can help turn the potential eyesore and financial black hole into a regional attraction with economic benefits that extend beyond the property's boundaries.

Communities have recently been faced with critical choices as the owner of these dying shopping centers, must decide whether to refurbish, continue to operate a declining asset, or consider a more dramatic change to restore the property's value.

Local governments are beginning to show more flexibility in zoning and development standards combined with public-private tools like tax-increment financing, to encourage redevelopment of old shopping centers for such uses.

Nestled in the heart of Dublin, the currently vacant grocery store could be transformed into a vibrant mixed-use town center. A mixed-use town center can create a walk able downtown area and a sense of place where there was none, while helping to contain development and curb sprawl in the area. Dublin's mixed-use town center could include a business center to provide temporary office space for new industries, a variety of room sizes to accommodate groups and meetings of all sizes, an auditorium, pre-function areas, catering kitchen, and a terrace overlooking Dublin's charming historic district. Transforming this valuable space into a unique blend of innovative design and technology- savvy equipped with the purpose to engage the community and the residents within the commercial district. In which helps achieve our goal of transforming the commercial district with a mixed-use design.

Additional options could include a tech campus for the growing professional service and data center industries, a medical fulfillment center, a customer-service call center.

Developing a mixed-use town center is a complex proposition with unique challenges. Successful projects are built with trusting public-private partnerships. Support during the project design, review, and development process is only one of the prerequisites for a successful public-private partnership.

Big Idea 3: Senior Living Community

Part of the question posed to our group is “*how to invest in the surrounding neighborhoods to extend downtown’s vitality.*” As part of the solution to this question, we recommend developing a senior living community down the Oconee River and surrounding River View Park Golf Club. This would connect the residents of this senior living community with the Golf Club, the River Walk, and Downtown Dublin, accomplishing both goals of helping to retain merchants downtown, and increasing Downtown Dublin’s vitality while also giving residents direct easy access to all of Downtown’s assets. With the largest U.S. generation in the midst of retirement, the Baby Boomer cohort is vastly changing the senior housing landscape. As the housing market gradually improves and the development of senior housing chases the increasing demand, Baby Boomers are a highly selective cohort with more buying and spending power than their predecessors, are healthier and more active, and are demanding an unconventional modification of alternative senior housing. The “traditional” senior community is outdated and no longer seen as a viable choice for retirement, and new and innovative models have surpassed the old-fashioned establishments.

Dublin is a Certified Retirement Community and “Dublin hosts a thriving medical community; its hospitals are the county’s largest employers. In addition to Fairview Park Hospital with 150 physicians on staff, Dublin is home to the sprawling campus of Carl Vinson Veterans Administration Medical Center. Located on U.S. 80 on the west side of town, it anchors the city’s growing commercial strip. The ready availability of medical services also has helped fuel the county’s budding aspirations to be a retirement destination. *Reference: Dublin Laurens County Making Things Happen Georgia Trend 2009.*

Dublin has been working to promote itself as a retirement community after becoming certified, and we believe that a Senior Living community in this area will help Dublin achieve this goal. This Senior Living Community will give retirees easy access to the amenities downtown Dublin has to offer, as well as a getaway to the River Walk or the Golf Club, making it very easy for retirees to live and play in Dublin. Many communities are becoming golf cart friendly, and we would recommend this be a part of this project. This would allow seniors an easy and inviting way to get out and enjoy the community.

A mixed-use master planned unique senior living destination would provide an innovative Senior Living Community with complementary amenities and anchor tenant for downtown Dublin. Providing Dublin with something totally new in retirement living. Creating an environment to bring generations together in a community that would blend tradition with contemporary comfort and 21st Century care. Greenbrier Development and/or Louie Curry with Curry Realtors may be good resources to start the planning process for this initiative.

Scope of the Initiative

This recommendation would be implemented by acquiring the homes in this area that are in disrepair and replacing them with a mixed-use development of senior living community with independent living apartments, assisted living units, estate homes, and nursing beds. As the largest generation in U.S. history, with over 2.8 million people born between 1946 and 1964, Baby Boomers are a key segment of the population that are organically and inorganically shaping the growing shift in housing and social needs.

With Baby Boomers in the midst of retiring at a vast rate with no sign of slowing down, the need for senior housing is becoming increasingly significant and exceedingly competitive to meet market preferences. To meet specific needs and exceeding preferences of today and tomorrow's Baby Boomers and seniors, retirement communities can no longer solely be a place for aging and accommodation, but instead must be tailored to enhance activity and quality of life, meanwhile providing tiered levels of comfort, care, and service for the various aging stages of the elderly.

There is evidence suggesting Baby Boomers are seeking "maintenance-free living, easy lifestyles, and more leisure time". They ultimately want to enhance their quality of life, desiring pedestrian oriented and mixed-use communities that are aesthetically designed to promote walk ability, social activity, and connectivity. Among the innovative senior community models, the Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) combines a variety of unique residential options and comprehensive services that meet the needs of new and active retirees and aging seniors. A Continuing Care Residential Community (CCRC) is a specific type of senior community offering a variety of services, however it is distinct in that it provides a progression of services from independent living to full-time nursing care, a one-stop shop focusing on wellness activities and amenities.

In fulfilling market demands, CCRCs and other senior housing projects remain among the most practical land use options. From a community perspective, they create new construction and service jobs, do not add to the crowding of area schools for children, give sizable payments-in-lieu-of taxes for municipal purposes, and provide attractive campuses that also serve as good neighbors.

One of the most prominent and fulfilling planning techniques for senior communities has, and will continue to be, the assimilation and cohesion with the natural environment. Nature matters to people. Big trees and small trees, glistening water, chirping birds, budding bushes, colorful flowers— these are important ingredients in a good life. Nature is a vital ally in building functional and sustainable communities. Nature can engage involuntary attention, provide mental restoration, reduce stress, and allow the body to be recharged to a healthy state. After a lifetime of hardships and experiences, it is essential for seniors to connect with the calming and positive characteristics that nature provides. *Reference:* www.searston.com www.greenbrierdevelopment.com

Funding Opportunities

The main hurdle for any endeavor is to find the money to make it happen. If a local philanthropist cannot be found to fund the project, you must go the second route and look for federal, state and other sources of private dollars. **The following potentials for funding relate to all ideas and opportunities outlined in our proposal.**

- Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Transportation Enhancement Grants (TEA Grants)
- Private sources of funding such as the Woodford Foundation or Knight Foundation
- Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR) for soft service funding of trails
- Local City/County funding of daily operations.
- Private/Business matching funds.

Partnerships – To create a coalition of communities along the Oconee River that can partner together for funding opportunities to expand the connectivity. Those communities are: White, Hall, Jackson, Clarke, Oconee, Greene, Morgan, Baldwin, Wilkinson, Laurens, and Wheeler.

The jurisdiction over the Oconee River below Lake Sinclair is by the Oconee River Greenway Authority in Baldwin County and the jurisdiction lies from Baldwin County to where the river meets with the Ocmulgee River. The establishment of a river walk provides limitless growth for a community. In addition, Georgia River Network is establishing “Blue Ways” where groups can canoe the river and camp along the way at way points. Blue Ways are established on the Ocmulgee River but not on the Oconee River.

SPLOST Funds. – Laurens County has an annual \$686 Million in retail sales, generating significant SPLOST funds that can be used for this type of project. The most recent SPLOST in Laurens County is expected to generate between \$50 Million and \$60 Million during the life of the SPLOST. More specifically, since the SPLOST was enacted in 2003, the City of Dublin has averaged collections of approximately \$2.6M each year. The City has in the past issued revenue anticipation bonds to fund specified voter approved projects which were repaid with future revenues from the SPLOST.

TSPLOST Funds – Laurens County is part of the Heart of Georgia Region that was one of three regions in the state to pass the TSPLOST. The Heart of Georgia Region will receive approximately \$400 Million. With local buy in from the City and County Government from SPLOST proceeds, possible public state funding and other money raised from local businesses, the funding for these projects could become a reality.

Timeline

Short-term:

- Create an action committee to spear head the projects. Include City and County officials as well as the Development Authority, and other interested community members.
- Identify key properties along the river that could be donated or purchased.
- Contact public and private funding sources.

Mid-term:

- Create a survey or drawing of the entire project, to help promote the project interest and to receive funding, as well as steer the direction of the project.

Long Term:

- Take the required steps to construct and implement the river walk.
- Once the River Walk is complete, improve the amphitheater to help start drawing people to the river.
- Implement the streetscape to help connect the river project with the existing Dublin assets, helping to spread the revitalization effort throughout the entire downtown.
- Connect the River Project with the Golf Course, the Retirement Community, and the Convention Center through streetscapes and sidewalks providing residents easy access to all downtown has to offer.

Acknowledgements

The Heart of Dublin Group of the 2014 Class of Young Gamechangers would like to thank the following individuals who contributed to our knowledge and understanding of Dublin/Laurens County and who aided in the sharing and exchanging of ideas.

- Wesley Allen – East Laurens High School Student and Dublin/Laurens Youth Leadership
- Bill Brown – Councilman – City of Dublin
- Jennifer Bryant – Advisor Dublin/Laurens Youth Leadership
- Brent Burney – West Laurens High School Student and Dublin/Laurens Youth Leadership
- Wayne Cain – Chief of Police Dublin Police Department
- Jeff Davis – Owner Alterra Networks, LLC and Dublin Downtown Development Authority
- W.A. “Bill” Harrell – Sheriff, Laurens County Sheriffs Department
- Lance Jones - Attorney, City of Dublin
- Joshua Kight – Attorney/Dublin Downtown Development Authority
- Joe Kinard, III – Clerk/Finance Director, City of Dublin
- Willie Paulk – President Dublin-Laurens County Chamber of Commerce
- Dubose Porter- Executive Editor – Dublin Courier Herald and former Georgia State

Representative

- Brenda Smith - Dublin Housing Authority
- Gerald Smith - Councilman, City of Dublin
- Frankie Surine – Deano’s Restaurant and Dublin Downtown Development Authority
- Dr. Steven Swanovik – Dublin Campus Director Middle Georgia State College
- Cal Wray – Former President Dublin-Laurens County Development Authority

Citations

- *Multi-Region Corridor Feasibility Study Phase II Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region*
- *Dublin Laurens County Making Things Happen Georgia Trend 2009.*
- *New Town Macon Strategic Action Plan*



GROUP 2

Gateway Gang

While Laurens County is located on I-16 with several exits, it lacks welcoming gateways into the community and a cohesive signage program to help visitors find their way to the city of Dublin. How might Laurens County improve its community gateways and signage while creating an appealing brand?



Gateway Gang Group Members

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- Odie Donald, Executive Director, Coastal Workforce Services
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- Emily B. Patteson, Grants Manager, SunTrust Bank Foundations & Endowments Specialty Practice
- Sarah Roche, Director of Community Engagement, United Way of Central Georgia
- Teddy Reese, Esq., Director of Community Operations and Affairs, Georgia Appleseed Center for Law & Justice
- Beau Turpin, Film producer/writer
- Ingrid Varn, Executive Director, Vidalia Area CVB



Gateway Gang

Executive Summary

While Laurens County is located on I-16 with several exits, it lacks welcoming gateways into the community and a cohesive signage program to help visitors find their way to the city of Dublin. How might Laurens County improve its community gateways and signage while creating an appealing brand?

Dublin's downtown and Interstate Interchange (Exit 51) are undergoing tremendous improvements, and the need to grow a strong connection between travelers of the I-16 corridor and the attractions of Dublin's downtown is vital to business retention and growth. With the recent state designation of the Visitor's Center at Exit 51 as a Regional Visitor's Information Center, travelers are encouraged to visit downtown and destinations across Laurens County.

Despite this enhancement, Dublin's main gateway lacks the visual appeal offered by its vibrant downtown area. Continuity and coordination among the city, county, state, volunteer organizations, and other authorities is needed to make the connection from the gateways into the heart of the city, due to the physical distance that separates downtown and the interstate.

The Gateway Gang recommends using Visit Dublin's existing branding campaign to coordinate the redesign of Dublin's Motor Vehicle, Non-Motor Vehicle, and Virtual gateways. The Gang has identified Interstate 16's Exit 51 as Dublin's main motor vehicle gateway, and suggests developing this and subsequent motor vehicle gateways in four phases. Due to Dublin's proximity to State Bicycle Route 40, which runs from Columbus to Savannah (with Dublin at its center), the accessibility of non-motor vehicle gateways is also a key component to successfully attracting and retaining visitors.

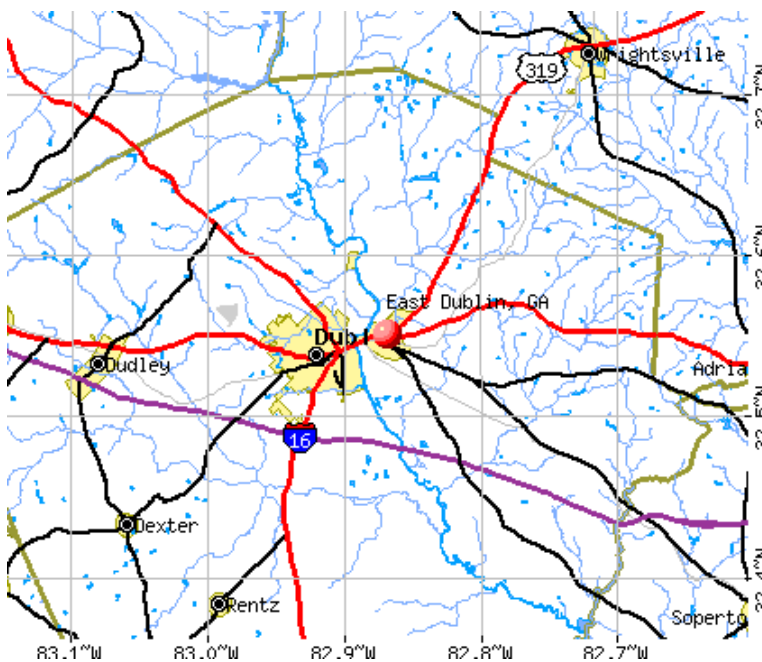
With an estimated 150,000 cyclist utilizing SBR 40 annually, Dublin could capitalize on this segment of tourist traffic by creating bike-friendly conditions in three phases, with a relatively small initial financial investment. Along with enhancing Dublin's motorized and non-motorized gateways, coordinating a consistent, attractive, and informative virtual gateway serves to attract, educate, and notify potential visitors of Dublin's activities, attractions, and development.

Using Visit Dublin's "Ahead of the Curve" brand coordinates a variety of messaging from the areas key stakeholders to include Laurens County, the City of Dublin, key volunteer organizations, and other important authorities. Using this unified brand across a variety of mediums in coordination with recommended enhancements will entice visitors to stay, interact with, and become a part of the community.

The Problem

While Laurens County is located on I-16 with several exits, it lacks welcoming gateways into the community and a cohesive signage program to help visitors find their way to the city of Dublin. How might Laurens County improve its community gateways and signage while creating an appealing brand?

Enhancing Dublin's Gateways



Dublin is nestled comfortably among I-16, 441, 257, 19, and US-80. The city's location is filled with potential and offers opportunities for the municipality to capture visitor interest, lead them off the interstate, and into the city. To do so we believe it is imperative to enhance and in some ways redesign Dublin's existing gateways. Our recommendation leans

on Dublin's existing branding campaign to coordinate the redesign of Dublin's Motor Vehicle, Non-Motor Vehicle, Public Art and Virtual gateways. These recommendations are presented as three **Big Ideas**.

Big Idea 1: *Driving Dollars to Dublin*

Background

Georgia Interstate 16 runs from Macon to Savannah, Georgia, a distance of about 160 miles, with approximately 20,000 vehicles per day (or 7.3 million per

year) utilizing the thoroughfare. Dublin is one of the few stopping points along the center of I-16 with multiple exits, and accessibility to a major municipality. There are four exits ranging from mile 49 to mile 58 that are marked for Dublin. The most frequented by visitors is exit 51, which is also State highway 441. State highway 441 is utilized by approximately 15,000 vehicles per day or 5.5 million per year, and is less than 4 miles from the heart of downtown Dublin.

Even with downtown so near, most travelers do not venture far from the various exits upon entering the city. In an effort to address this issue, leadership has made significant efforts to encourage more travellers on I-16 to stop in Dublin. These efforts include the creation of a Welcome Center situated at exit 51, a recently established dog park located near the Welcome Center, and the installation of new strategically placed signage. The Dublin-Laurens Welcome Center has approximately 7,800 visitors per year. However, driving traffic away from the exit and towards downtown has proven difficult.

Phase I (July 2015-July 2017)



To capitalize on the current activity at exit 51, we recommend the incorporation of Visit Dublin's "Dublin, ahead of the curve" brand into signage and infrastructure. At the center of this recommendation, is the installation of "DUBLIN" signage on the 441 overpass, similar to this sign used in Orlando, FL.

Photo credit: <http://orlandorelocation.com/>

The proposed signage would utilize the same font/type as the existing "Ahead of the Curve" branding, and would require installation on both the East and West bound lanes. To fully exploit the concept, we recommend illuminating the proposed signage to attract the 3.5 million annual travelers (20,000 daily) who frequent I-16 at night.

In addition to adding signage to the overpass, we recommend branding exit ramps, medians, and green space through flowers and shrubbery to add "curb/curve appeal" to Dublin's gateways. The green space branding would expand on Dublin's existing example used on the City Hall lawn and further brand Dublin's exits/entry points.

The beautification and branding projects recommended in phase one should be relatively inexpensive, and many current funding streams exist to assist with similar projects such as the GDOT GATEway grant program. The GATEway Grant Program exists to help communities in their efforts to beautify roadsides along state routes. The funds may only be used for plants and their installation along state routes in Georgia. Any organization, local government, or state agency may apply for grants of up to \$50,000 for landscaping in the state right-of-way that displays the right-of-way in an attractive fashion and promotes pride in Georgia.

The overpass sign does not fall under fundable activities by any state or federal transportation grant programs and would most likely require public/private partnerships to fund. Other communities that have embarked on similar projects have been creative in terms of using SPLOST dollars, a special city savings account, or public and private bonds to help cover such costs.



Photo credit: Visit Dublin



Photo credit: Google images

Phase one of our suggestion to enhance motorized vehicle gateways catches the attention of travelers and passersby. The challenge then becomes encouraging visitors to make their way from the exit into downtown. We recommend installing decorative light posts (to include banner signs) along key intersections of 441. Such posts already exist downtown so the project would expand outward from downtown along 441 to I-16. These posts have multiple benefits: 1) additional lighting closer to the ground, provides a feeling of comfort and safety 2) provides a focal point for beautification at key intersections 3) provides useful or interesting information for travelers 4) installation done well, can create an easy to follow pathway and reference point for travelers unfamiliar with the area.

Banner signs attached to the light posts are interchangeable and would allow the city to brand the area, share information, and/or advertise special events.

Possible content includes:

- Parking information
- Distance from downtown and/or interstate (depending on direction)
- Dublin: Ahead of the Curve
- Thanks for visiting
- Come back to see us
- St. Patrick's Day and other local festivals



Funding sources for this project include the General Fund, tourism grants, and/or public/private partnerships.

Photos credit: Downtown Dublin Development Authority

Phase III (July 2019 - July 2021)

In addition to enhancing the existing main gateway of 441, we recommend the development of additional gateways. Suggested areas in order of priority include:

- Hwy 441 Bypass & Hwy 80
- I-16 & Hwy 257
- Hwy 441 Bypass & Business 441 (Old 441)
- Hwy 80 at Oconee River
- I-16 & Hwy 19

These new gateways would require an expansion on the recommended lighting and signage program as appropriate, along with the addition of lamppost at each intersection. Information would vary for northbound and southbound traffic, and could be used as a source of revenue and/or advertising. Additional gateways would also incorporate information regarding existing historical structures, or structures of local interest such as the proposed riverwalk, public art or fountains, and historic buildings.



Photo credit: www.tampabay.com

Here's one example of incorporating already existing historic pillars into a gateway design. Funding sources would be the same as for Phase 2 or could possibly be incorporated with funding streams for related projects as (such as public art, the riverwalk, or the proposed redevelopment of the Highway 80 bridge).

Phase IV (July 2021 - July 2026)

Signage and beautification are an important component to encouraging travelers to stop in Dublin. When exiting I-16 headed down 441, the highway leading in to downtown is five lanes wide. There are two lanes of traffic in each direction to include a turn lane. We recommend replacing the turn lane with a grass median. This enhancement assists in making the area more attractive and provides a convenient place to locate signs of interest for tourists, or light posts should the city choose to extend them into this corridor. This enhancement also has the added benefit of making the road safer for bikers and pedestrian traffic.



Photo Credit: <http://www.signalscv.com/section/36/article/>

Possible funding sources for such a project would include Federal and State programs such as the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), the Surface Transportation Program (STP), or the Transportation Investment Act (TIA).

Big Idea #1 SWOT Analysis

Strengths: Great potential for impact, benefits citizens as well as visitors.

Weaknesses: Parts of the proposal are expensive and require federal, state, and/or local funding. The overall recommendation could take 10-20 years to fully realize.

Opportunities: City/County government work well together, T-SPLOST and other funding is currently available, possibilities to weave together multiple projects and funding streams for greater impact.

Threats: Multifaceted project with many moving parts - community could lose interest before completion, competing priorities, DOT regulations.

References for Big Idea #1

- Existing signage locations were provided courtesy of Keep Dublin-Laurens Beautiful and the garden clubs.
- Visitor center information provided by Visit Dublin.
- Traffic counts provided by GDOT website STARS program.

Estimated Budget

Item	Estimated Cost	Qty	Total
I-16 Sign on Bridge	\$200,000.00	2	\$400,000.00
Landscaping (Bridge Banks)	\$50,000.00	1	\$50,000.00
Landscaping (Medians I-16)	\$50,000.00		\$50,000.00
Landscaping (Medians 441)	\$50,000.00	1	\$50,000.00
Sidewalks (441)	\$25,000.00	1	\$25,000.00
Gateway Structures	\$10,000.00	5	\$50,000.00
Light Posts	\$1,500.00	35	\$52,500.00
Direction Posts	\$250.00	20	\$5,000.00
Trees & Shrubbery	\$15,000.00	1	\$15,000.00
Total			\$697,500.00

Big Idea 2: *Expand Routes to Vitality*

(US-80/GA-19 Bikeway, US 441)

Background

Nationwide, interest in “adventure travel,” outdoor activities, and bicycle touring, are growing. Georgia’s climate, geography, and rich history are ideal for attracting affluent, low-impact bicycle tourists. Dublin currently features a bikeable street grid and a bicycle-friendly topography. Aside from a handful of downtown bike racks, however, the city lacks any meaningful bicycle accommodations such as bike lanes or multi-use paths.

The primary opportunity for bicycle tourism is the development and promotion of State Bicycle Route 40 (SBR 40), which runs from Columbus, through the center of Dublin (US 80/GA 19/GA 29/ Bellevue Ave), on to Savannah. SBR 40 is part of the Georgia DOT’s state bicycle route system, a statewide network of roadways designated as preferred routes for inter-city and long-distance bicycling. Several of these routes have already been identified with wayfinding signage and some feature bicycle accommodations, including bike lanes and bikeable shoulders. SBR 40 currently does not feature any such signage or facilities and is therefore a “hidden” bicycle route.

SBR 40 connects the cities of Columbus and Savannah, with Dublin positioned as the halfway point between these popular destinations. The trip from Columbus to Dublin is approximately 140 miles (2-3 days by bike), while the trip from Dublin to Savannah is approximately 120 miles (2-3 days by bike). The total trip would take 5-6 days for the typical touring cyclist, which would include an overnight stay in the city of Dublin. Many cross-country bicycle tourists already start or end their journeys in Savannah. An attractive, well-promoted route through Dublin would ensure that their itinerary would include SBR 40 and a visit to Dublin.

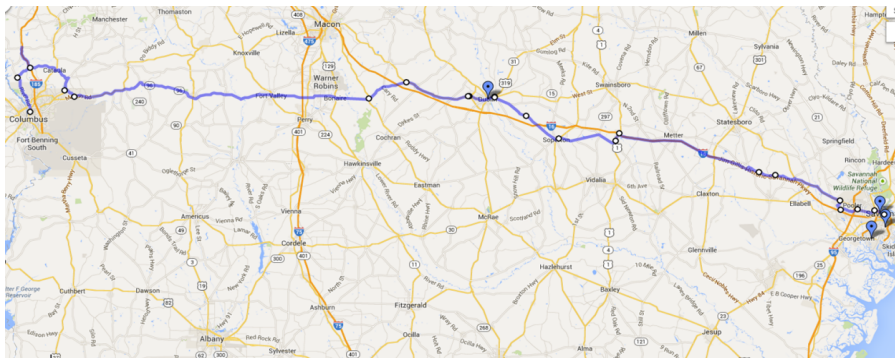


Image credit:
Google Maps

Transportation Planning in the Dublin Area

Regional transportation planning efforts are coordinated by the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission (HOGARC). HOGARC produced a “Regional Plan” in May of 2013, which notes that “there is ... significant potential to improve transportation infrastructure and access through the T-SPLOST...[and] development of bicycle and other multi-use trails.”

The 2005 Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission Bike-Ped Plan adds the following notes about SBR 40:

“State Bike Route 40 is called the Trans-Georgia Route and traverses the state in an east-west direction between Savannah and Columbus. It is the only one of the 14 designated state bike routes located within the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region. In western Laurens County at its border with Wilkinson County, State Bike Route 40 begins on U.S. Highway 80 and continues to the City of Dublin. In Dublin, State Bike Route 40 transitions to State Highway Route 29 and follows it to the City of Soperton. In Soperton, State Bike Route 40 changes to follow State Highway Route 46 and continues on this route to the City of Metter, and on through to the Candler County/Bulloch County line. State Bike Route 40 is within the Region for a distance of about 85 miles. This includes mileage through Laurens (34.9 miles), Treutlen (19.7), Emanuel (12.5), and Candler (17.8) counties.

Bicyclists have noted that the U.S. 80 portion in Laurens County, in particular, is not conducive to safe bicycling. Facilities and signing along the route are limited. Even though Georgia State Bike Route 40 is a designated state bicycle route, it does not necessarily have paved shoulders or other facilities.”

Efforts to create more attractive gateways into downtown Dublin should focus on redesign and improvement of both traditional motorized gateways (e.g. US 441, I-16 exits) as well as comprehensive improvements to the underutilized but promising SBR 40 corridor for non-motorized tourists.

Phase I: July 2015 – July 2016

To enhance the SBR 40 corridor we recommend the installation of wayfinding signage along Bellevue Ave/US 80 indicating that the route is designated as State Bike Route 40, along with mileage or distance-to-destination signage directing touring cyclists to desired destinations (e.g. downtown Dublin, Greenway*, restaurants, lodging, etc.).

We also recommend additional installations to include shared lane markings ("sharrows") on narrower segments of the in-town route where the addition of bike lanes are not feasible {due to available right of way (ROW)}, "Share the Road" + "Bicycles Allowed Full Use of Lane" signs in conjunction with shared lane markings, and ten additional bicycle parking spaces, including on-street bike corrals, at desired destinations (e.g. downtown Dublin, Greenway*, restaurants, lodging, etc.).

Item	Estimated Cost	Qty	Total
Bike Route Signage	\$150.00	10	\$1,500.00
Shared lane markings ("sharrows")	\$200.00	10	\$2,000.00
Bicycle parking	\$400.00	10	\$4,000.00
			\$7,500.00

Potential Funding Sources

Local: General Fund, TSPLOST

State/Federal: STP, HSIP

Other: Tourism Grants

Phase II: July 2016 – July 2019



Photo credits: Google Maps Streetview, Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, City of Decatur

We also recommend the installation of 12' paved multi-use paths alongside Bellevue Ave. During routine scheduled resurfacing work on Bellevue Ave (and other appropriate routes), we recommend a reconfiguration of lane widths to allow for the installation of bicycle facilities, in the following order of priority:

- Buffered bike lanes
- Bike lanes
- Bikable shoulders
- Painted intersection treatments such as bike boxes



We also recommend the development, design, and construction of a bicycle tourist pocket park in or near downtown Dublin featuring:

- Sheltered bike parking
- Restrooms
- Water fountain
- Mobile bicycle repair stand
- Bicycle supplies and snack vending
- Camp sites/overnight shelter, if appropriate



Photo credits: Walton Wellness, UGA Office of Sustainability, Bikeovernights.org

Item	Estimated Cost	Qty	Total
12' multi-use path	\$650,000/mile**	1	\$650,000.00
Buffered bike lanes/bike lanes*	\$500	10	\$5,000.00
Bikable shoulders*	\$0 additional cost		\$0
Intersection treatments	\$750	4	\$3,000.00
TOTAL			\$705,300.00

Potential Funding Sources

Local: General Fund, TSPLOST, Public/Private Partnerships
 State/Federal: STP, HSIP, RTP, State Tourism Grants

Phase III: July 2016 – July 2020



Partner with GDOT, surrounding counties, and the MPOs from Columbus and Savannah to plan and prioritize bicycle facilities and signage along remainder of SBR 40

With the Georgia Department of Economic Development and stakeholders from Columbus, Fort Valley, and Savannah, host an official, supported spring/fall bicycle tour of SBR 40

Continue improving bicycle safety and access along entire route as opportunities present themselves, e.g.

- Routine re-surfacing projects
- Reconstruction
- Bridge replacement



Photo credits: Google Maps Streeview, Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, nacto.org, Georgia Bikes, Inc.

Potential Funding Sources

Local: General Fund, TSPLOST
State/Federal: STP, HSIP

Item	Estimated Cost	Qty	Total
Reconstruction of roadway to allow for inclusion of bikable shoulder or 5' bike lane	\$130,000.00/mile**	5	\$650,000.00
Routine resurfacing	\$0 additional cost	20	\$0.00
Bridge replacement	\$3,500,000.00**	1	\$3,500,000.00
			\$4,150,000.00

* Does not include the completion of proposed riverside Greenway project.

** This is an estimated total cost and does not reflect an amount that would be borne by the City of Dublin or Laurens County. Replacement of the US 80 bridge over the Oconee River would almost certainly utilize 90% state/federal funds.

Approximate Total Cost to Implement Non-Motorized Gateway Improvements: \$4.5 million (80%+ federal/state funded); Recommendation assumes that approximately \$600,000.00 of total cost is assumed by Dublin Laurens County.

Riverwalk

Along with making Dublin a bike friendly community and connecting pedestrian traffic at the defined commercial area of I-16/441 to downtown, developing the existing river walk enhances non-motorized vehicle access to key sectors of the city. A fully developed Riverwalk also allows easier pedestrian and non-motorized vehicular and boat access along the Oconee River to expand Laurens County's outdoor and recreational trails as a key tourism offering, which transforms the Oconee into a major tourism gateway into downtown Dublin.

Big Idea 2 SWOT Analysis

Strengths: Great potential for economic impact, with additional health and quality of life benefits for local citizens.

Weaknesses: Bridge replacements, in particular, require some local funding, but are contingent on federal and/or state funding, project could take 10-20 years to fully realize.

Opportunities: City/County government work well together, T-SPLOST and other funding is currently available, possibilities to weave together multiple projects and funding streams for greater impact.

Threats: Complicated project that requires regional coordination for success - community could lose interest before completion, other regions in the south may complete attractive bicycle touring destinations first.

References for Big Idea #2

- Georgia Bikes
- Georgia Department of Transportation
- Georgia Department of Economic Development - Tourism Division
- DuBose Porter
- Downtown Dublin Development Authority

Big Idea 3: *Connect the Virtual Dots*

(Incorporating Branding, Public Art and Cultural Planning)

Expanding “Brand Dublin”

Dublin is a vibrant city that perfectly blends the past with the present and the rural with the sophisticated, creating a community primed to capitalize on its bustling potential. The existing Visit Dublin branding campaign *Dublin, Ahead of the Curve* sits as the catalyst to revolutionizing the community’s brand image and serves as the conduit for implementing the proposed gateway enhancements.

The campaign combines the logo with vivid, emotion-evoking photography that creates a “picture yourself there” response that allows interstate travelers to connect the image of the familiar interstate signage with the surprisingly unexpected attractions and destinations throughout Dublin and Laurens County.



Photo credit: Visit Dublin

We recommend building upon Visit Dublin's existing branding campaign, and codifying Dublin's virtual gateways, brand efforts, and messaging throughout all virtual access points. We also recommend tying these virtual efforts to existing cultural planning efforts incorporating Dublin's uniqueness to include public art. This coordination not only enhances awareness, but ensures accessibility to target markets and increases overnight and long-term stays. Dublin's existing coordinated virtual gateways include:

Sites developed by Visit Dublin

- Visit Dublin GA: <http://visitdublinga.com/>
- River Bend WMA: <http://www.riverbendwma.com/>
- Beaverdam WMA: <http://www.beaverdamwma.com/>
- Dublin Carnegie: <http://www.dublincarnegie.com/>
- Retire Dublin GA: <http://www.retiredublinga.com>
- Old Post Office: <http://www.oldpostofficedublin.com>
- St. Patrick's Festival: <http://stpatricksdublinga.com>

Sites developed in partnership with the Downtown Development Authority:

- Market on Madison: <http://www.marketonmadison.com>
- Fred Roberts: <http://www.dublinfredroberts.com>

In addition to the coordination and development of websites, these gateways also include digital and social media outlets devoted to promoting existing and newly developed attractions and destinations in Laurens County, and it is recommended to develop a strong YouTube, TripAdvisor, and Pinterest identity as well as future social media offerings.

Current branding materials visually and verbally portray Dublin as an active community where business booms, big things happen and things are always “Ahead of the Curve.” Through the creation of a cohesive marketing campaign highlighting available gateways and offerings, Dublin will establish succinct messaging that positively impacts the traveler’s existing image of Dublin and encourages more than the arbitrary interstate stop.

Restoring existing murals or other artwork of an iconic Dublin scene or building, and highlighting these efforts in real time, adds a one of a kind tourist attraction unlike any other in the region. Dublin’s murals are currently in less than ideal condition:

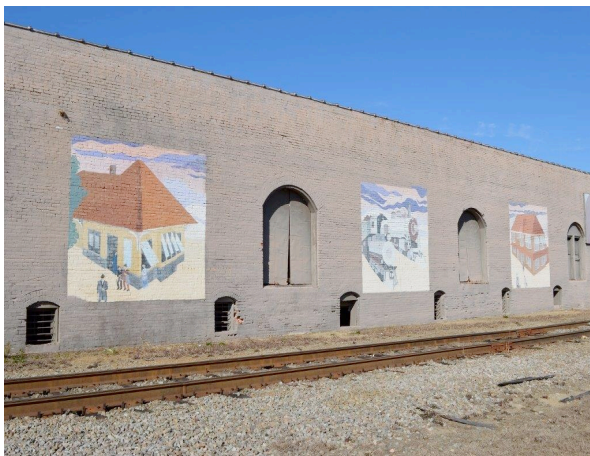


Photo credit: Visit Dublin



Example of a maintained mural; Photo credit:



Example of a maintained mural; Photo credit:
www.visitflorida.com



Source: Pittsburgh Arts Council
www.pittsburghartscouncil.org

Short Term Goal

We recommend the establishment of a designated local arts agency (LAA) for Dublin and Laurens County- LAAs may be established by resolution of the municipality at no cost. The local government can support its local arts agency at less than 10% of the proposed organizations overall budget, although the organization is qualified to apply for grant money on behalf of the city and/or county. A local arts agency may also be a governmental agency, like an Office of Cultural Affairs. A department such as this would need at least one staff member, so the budget would have to support that staff member and programs. Local arts agencies can be 501(c)3 non-profits or governmental agencies. LAAs develop and support artists, arts organizations, and public art in a community with services, financial support, resources, and planning. More information on Local Arts Agencies can be found at these links:

- National Endowment for the Arts: <http://arts.gov/artistic-fields/local-arts-agencies>
- Americans for the Arts, Local Arts Network: <http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/local-arts-network>
- List of Local Arts Agencies in Georgia: <http://artsgeorgia.net/wp/directory/local-arts-agency-directory>

Long Term Goal

We recommend the creation of a Cultural Master Plan for Dublin Laurens County. Developing this plan requires the development of community assessments to determine the existing number of artists, amount of public art, and number of arts organizations in Dublin and Laurens County. Using information attained from assessments and incorporating Dublin's future goals, the city can develop strategic goals for artist development, arts organization development, and a public art master plan with the overall goal of creating and maintaining an existing yet underutilized attraction.

A cultural master plan should be a component of, or directly tied to, the Local Arts Agency's strategic plan, containing plans and funding goals for public art restoration, a sustainable maintenance plan, and strategic development of new public art. The plan would highlight art in public spaces or cultural happenings

that occur in public spaces, such as temporary installations of public art, performances, or festivals. Current trends in the arts have shown that temporary installations can be catalyst for the reactivation of unused or under-used public/commercial space.

Funding Sources for Public Art

Local and supplemental funding is essential to sustain and maintain public art. It is important to maintain what already exists before creating new public art. Resources for best practices and funding sources for public art include the following:

- Americans for the Arts Public Art Network: <http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/public-art-network>
- Georgia Council for the Arts Grants: <http://www.gaarts.org/grant-funding/apply-for-a-grant/available-funding>

Big Idea 3 SWOT Analysis

Strengths: This proposed idea can be the anchor or community involvement, festivals, and events. It can allow you to highlight local talent, while bringing in big names that will draw crowds. This idea will certainly add to the beatification of the city. Plant murals are beneficial to the environment and require less skills as painting.

Weaknesses: If structures that are targeted for this idea are not currently owned by the city, proceeding with require an agreement with property owners. Artistic talent can be expensive and requires much consideration. The city will need to weigh the cost of the artist with the production of a masterful piece.

Opportunities: Dublin is surrounded by large rural areas which focus on farming. In addition to growing flowers and plants, Dublin should consider planting locations where local farmers can provide an exhibit garden. The opportunity exists to include surrounding communities in events happening in Dublin.

Threats: Single and personal interest can derail this idea. Dublin will need to make sure the interest transverse all racial and economic boundaries.

References for Big Idea #3

- Visit Dublin
- Georgia Department of Transportation
- Georgia Department of Economic Development - Economic Impact Calculator

Estimated Budget

Item	Estimated Cost	Qty	Total
Local Arts Agency Operating Budget	\$225,000.00	1	\$225,000.00*
Public Art Restoration	\$100,000	1	\$100,000.00**
Total			\$325,000.00

Note: Local Arts Agency budget represents total for a three-year commitment, while public art restoration is expected to be 100% grant funded.

Logistics/ Intergovernmental Cooperation

To successfully implement these recommendations, a high level of intergovernmental and community collaboration is required. This cooperation is almost impossible considering the multiple governmental jurisdictions that a person must enter while traveling from I-16 to Downtown Dublin. To facilitate these activities we recommend:

Developing A Unified Community Enhancement Policy

Create a coordinated city and county policy that encourages and enforces the maintenance of the main gateway's appearance. The policy requires new business to maintain a certain level of beautification and upkeep as designated by the local government entities. Existing businesses can be given a grandfather exception or be required to comply within a certain number of year.

Foster Community Engagement In Beautification Efforts

Create city/county funded activities that create public engagement, rewarding both business and private property owners for beautification efforts (e.g. Annual

best kept property award). These activities encourage and support partnerships with public sector and nonprofit organizations such as the existing garden and rotary clubs. It also encourages the creation of new businesses and community organizations. These organizations also foster new activities and revenue generators such as annual arts competitions and community-funded festivals.

Evaluating Effectiveness

The overall success of these recommendations can be measured by the following:

- Increased traffic flow to downtown Dublin and Laurens County
- Increased existing business revenues and customer base
- Decrease in business turnover with increased business recruitment and retention
- Increased tax base
- Increased sales tax revenue
- Increased home sales and construction
- Increased new business development and construction
- Increased volunteer base
- Increased population, with special note on the 55 and over market
- Increased tourism activity
 - Hotel/Motel tax revenue
 - Traffic counts at Visitors Center
 - Event attendance and participation (vendor, media, sponsors, and tourist)
 - Requests for information
 - Website traffic
 - Social media growth
 - Development of existing assets
 - Development of new markets and niches
 - Increased retail, dining, and leisure business development

Total Project Estimated Budget

Item	Total
Big Idea 1	\$697,500.00
Big Idea 2	\$605,000.00
Big Idea 3	\$225,000.00
Total Estimated Cost	\$1,527,500.00

Return on Investment Analysis

According to the Georgia Department of Transportation approximately 3.5M travelers frequent I-16 annually. Another estimated 10,000 cyclist utilize State Bike Route 40 for cross state/country trips. According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, Laurens County collected close to \$2M in local tax revenues. Return on Investment (ROI) figures assume that the recommendations, once implemented, result in the following:

Assumption	Estimated Cost	Total
Recommendations result in 3% of annual I-16 travelers visit Dublin	105,000 visitors	
Recommendations result in 10% of SBR 40 annual travelers visiting Dublin	1,000 visitors	
5% of increased visitors stay over a minimum of 1 night at \$85.00/night	5,300 stays	\$450,500.00
Of the increased visitors 0.75% permanently re-locate to Dublin 0.75% of 106,000 visitors = 795citizens w/a annual salary of \$35,000 at a 2.5% tax rate (\$459, 375 annually)	795citizens	\$695,625.00
20 new businesses created in Downtown Dublin Note: Assumes \$200,000 annual revenues per business w/ 10% tax rate (400,000.00/annually)	20 business	\$400,000.00
Increase in local tax revenue of 5% (permits, festivals, business licenses, construction, etc.) Note: assumption based on 2011 GDEcD local tax collection figure of \$1.92M		\$96,000.00
Total Estimated ROI		\$1,642,125.00

Based on preliminary assumptions, once all recommendations are implemented the combined “Big Ideas” would have a 100% return on investment in year one. The ROI assumption is breaks even despite underestimating Hotel/Motel tax revenue, Business tax rates, and local sales tax rates.

Key Stakeholders

City of Dublin
Laurens County
Downtown Dublin Development Authority
Dublin Laurens Tourism
Keep Dublin-Laurens Beautiful
Garden Club
Public Interest Community
The Business Community
Laurens County Educational System
Georgia Department of Transportation

First Stakeholders Meeting Attendees

George Roussell - City Manager
Jackie Durden - Garden Club
Patsy Baker - Keep Dublin-Laurens Beautiful
Will Curry - Curry Companies
Troy Windham
Lori Hennesy - GDEcD

Second Stakeholders Meeting Attendees

Ken Padgett - GDOT
Randy Jackson - Chamber of Commerce
Mrs. Tyre - Garden Club
Jerry Davis - City Council
Julie Driger - City Council
Jeff Davis - Visit Dublin
Joshua Kight - Downtown Dublin Development Authority

Other Resources

http://www.advocacyadvance.org/site_images/content/Atlanta_funding_profile_Final.pdf

<http://www.atlantaregional.com/transportation/financing-transportation>

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policyinformation/statistics/2011/>

http://georgiabikes.org/files/Costs_for_Pedestrian_and_Bicycle_Improvements_2013.pdf

<http://www.dot.ga.gov/doingbusiness/PoliciesManuals/roads/DesignPolicy/GDOT-DPM-Chap09.pdf>

GROUP 3

D³-Determined to Develop Dublin

Several national and international companies call Dublin-Laurens County home. How can this community strengthen its international appeal, and in the process, attract more entrepreneurs and retirees?





D³-Determined to Develop Dublin Group Members

- Christopher Cooper, Peace Keeper/Harmonizer
- ReKasa Hart, Organizer
- Austin Dickson, Group Member
- Amy Duke, Editor
- Chris Floore, IT Specialist
- Bo Harmon, Group Member
- Kelly Herrington, Co-Project Manager/Local Liaison
- Cristi Jones, Editor
- Kimberly Lawson, IT Specialist
- Ralph Staffins, Group Member
- William John Wood, Editor
- Bryan Zulko, Project Manager



D³-Determined to Develop Dublin

Executive Summary

Throughout Georgia, communities founded in agriculture and trades tied to the railroads at the turn of the century have forged for themselves an infrastructure of utilities and an evolution of industry to keep their cities, counties, and regions thriving. What makes Laurens County unique is historical leadership that has made advancements decades before mandates and on par with some of the largest metropolitans in the U.S. – including, a local airport able to serve commercial traffic, a state-of-the-art fiber optics network installed before the millennium and a downtown Wi-Fi cloud. The 2014 Georgia Forward's Young Gamechangers class has been tasked with providing recommendations on how Dublin-Laurens County can strengthen their international appeal while simultaneously attracting more entrepreneurs and retirees. The subsequent proposal strives to address these vital issues while providing tangible and realistic recommendations for improvement.

ATTRACTING ENTREPRENEURS

Dublin-Laurens County is also supportive of budding businesses through commercial banks, the Downtown Development Authority and access to a Small Business Development Center representative. However, these resources lack continuity, and it can be difficult to access the tools needed. Consolidating the resources and setting up access to the tools would remove road blocks for budding entrepreneurs, accelerate the growth and development of existing businesses and provide volunteer opportunities for members of the community looking to give back

- One-stop virtual resource center for entrepreneurs and businesses
- Business Specialist available to guide entrepreneurs
- Communication and cohesion among organizations that provide services to entrepreneurs
- Online portal with business resources and information about Access Dublin Programs
- Seminars, Business Plan Competition and Idea Symposium

ATTRACTING RETIREES

A tool that is commonly used in downtown revitalization and tourism that has not been leveraged in Dublin is the arts scene. A contribution from the art scene to the already aggressive downtown revitalization taking place could be a perfect marriage. Developing a thriving cultural arts scene in downtown Dublin will have a multi-pronged effect on the community. Downtown development will attract entrepreneurs and young professionals and in turn create resources for international companies. All of these

things make for a very powerful economy which creates a multitude of resources and opportunities for retirees.

- Incentives for artisan retail space Downtown Dublin
- Artist in residence program offering gallery and living space in exchange for community assistance
- Downtown art incubator and cultural center to house the residency program and art exhibits on Main Street
- Monthly arts event to highlight the arts such as a “Sip and See” night
- Arts and Commerce Alliance for fundraising, events and incubator coordination

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL APPEAL

The creation of a Workforce Development Alliance will assist in combating several hurdles to increasing international appeal for companies in Laurens County. These barriers include; growing skill gaps, rapidly advancing technology, expanding globalization, demographic shifts, broken workforce pipeline, and lack of entrepreneurial skills. At the same time, core beliefs about economic development strategies are shifting to a system which places a higher value on the quality and characteristics of the workforce than traditional strategies and tactics such as financial incentives and cheap labor. By incorporating a truly robust “team” structure, historical sensitivities between County and City may drastically subside and without doubt, diminish various duplications of services.

- Alliance comprised of a comprehensive delegation of community representatives from education, economic development, local governments, retirees, veterans, and various community based organizations dedicated to truly collaborative solutions for county-wide issues
- Educational and Industrial Development Liaison tasked with creating synergy between scholastic curriculum and industry needs
- Leadership Apprenticeships with Youth Mentorships, a Model Laurens County program and Leadership Camp
- Promoting the Career Academy and International Baccalaureate programs

Statement of Problem/Challenge

Several national and international companies call Dublin-Laurens County home. How can this community strengthen its international appeal, and in the process, attract more entrepreneurs and retirees?

Background/Introduction

Laurens County, Georgia was created on December 10, 1807. Formed from Wilkinson and later Washington and Montgomery counties, the county was situated on lands formerly occupied by Creek and Yuchi Indians. The Mississippian mounds located at Fish Trap Cut are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Also located at the site are the remains of the oldest known Woodland Period village in Georgia, thought to date back as far as 100 B.C.

Laurens County was named for Col. John Laurens of South Carolina. Laurens served as Gen. George Washington's personal secretary and was instrumental in working with Benjamin Franklin in the procurement of aid of the French government which led to the Colonial Army's victory at Yorktown. More than a year after the surrender, Laurens was killed by remnants of the British army still fighting in South Carolina.

Population growth remained stagnate in the county's early years. Governor George M. Troup lived in the county from 1815 to 1856. During his residence, Troup served as a United States Senator and Governor. He was the first governor of the state to be elected by a popular vote. By the beginning of the Civil War in 1860, Laurens County had experienced little growth. Despite the fact that citizens elected to cooperate with the Northern state in an election issue of secession, Laurens County furnished more than 800 men who fought in almost all the major conflicts of the war. Among the most remarkable Laurens County soldiers in the entire Confederate Army was Private Bill Yopp, a former slave and the regimental drummer of the 14th Ga. Infantry. Yopp surrendered with his company at Appomattox and fifty years after the end of the war, re-established his lifelong friendship with Capt. Thomas M. Yopp, his former master. Yopp spent the last decade of his life raising money for his fellow Confederate veterans. Yopp, known as "Ten-Cent Bill," is the only African-American Confederate soldier buried in the Confederate National Cemetery in Marietta, Georgia.

After the war, Dublin and Laurens County suffered from a severe economic depression, no railroads, no newspaper and a declining population. In 1876, Dublin's first newspaper began the processing of rejuvenating river boat traffic and the establishment of railroads in the 1880s. After the construction of new railroads and bridges over the Oconee River, Dublin began to experience rapid growth. Its population grew from around 200 in 1880 to nearly 4000 in 1900, making it one of the state's largest cities. Dublin boosters boasted that Dublin, also known as "the Emerald

City," was "the only town in Georgia that's doublin' all the time." By 1911, the county produced more than 300 million pounds of cotton, a state record which stood until the end of the century when modern machinery expanded production. The failure of the cotton crop in the late 1910s ended the economic boom. Though the county maintained more farms than any other county in Georgia, many farmers left, including the family of Sugar Ray Robinson. Robinson, a part time resident of Dublin, is regarded as one of the greatest boxers of all time. As the population diminished, local banks, which at one time were outnumbered only by banks in Atlanta and Savannah, began to close.

The World War II years ironically brought the county out of the Great Depression. Soldiers, sailors and airmen from Laurens County participated in nearly every battle of the war from Pearl Harbor to the signing of the surrender with Japan. Especially prominent was Capt. Bobbie E. Brown, who was one of only a few Georgians to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The war effort brought the location of a Prisoner of War Camp and the U.S. Naval Hospital to Dublin. Shortly after the war, the hospital was converted into a VA Hospital and for more than sixty years has been one of the county's largest and most important employers.

The economy of Laurens County changed forever after the war with the establishment of the J.P Stephens textile plant near East Dublin. From that point workers began leaving the farm to work in factories. When the Dublin and Laurens County Development Authority was created in the early 1960s, a resurgence of various industries ignited a slow but steady growth. The year 1966 was highlighted by the first St. Patrick's Festival, which has attracted hundreds of thousands of participants over the last four decades.

Today, Dublin's population totals nearly 16,300 and Laurens County reaches nearly 48,000, with an economy that is supported by medical, retail, industry, agricultural, and service commerce. In the past 10 years, during the Great Recession, the area experienced large losses in jobs due to the closing of several large industries, such as Mowhawk, Southeast Paper, Alan Bradley, Bassett Furniture and Oxford. The City of Dublin and County of Laurens Development Authority has had recent success in attracting new businesses and industries that have almost restored employment to pre-recession levels. The continued growths in private and government medical services have also helped support and attract new industry and retail. Dublin and Laurens County is poised to grow by its ability to leverage its base scale, as compared to surrounding communities, for future economic development. Its strategic location between Savannah and Atlanta, located directly on Interstate 16, promises logistical industry opportunities as the Savannah Port is expanded in the next two years.

Big Idea 1: *Access Dublin Entrepreneur Gateway*



Goal

Access Dublin is an Entrepreneurial Gateway geared toward serving the needs of both aspiring and established business owners. This online portal will be a centralized resource centered around Educating, Empowering and Expanding new and existing businesses in Dublin and Laurens County.

Scope

Dublin-Laurens County is a very tight-knit community, where it feels like one big family. This is part of its charm. Dublin-Laurens County is also supportive of budding businesses through commercial banks, the Downtown Development Authority and access to a Small Business Development Center representative. However, these resources lack continuity, and it can be difficult to access the tools needed. Consolidating the resources and setting up access to the tools would remove road blocks for budding entrepreneurs, accelerate the growth and development of existing businesses and provide volunteer opportunities for members of the community looking to give back. In turn, a flurry of new businesses and new opportunities would make Dublin more attractive to consumers and professionals looking to locate in an active, hip community.

Recommendation SWOT

Strengths:

- Promotes cohesiveness among services currently offered
- Update with ease
- Virtual
- 24 hour access
- Cost efficient
- Addresses a need

Weaknesses:

- Only scratches the surface of the needs of entrepreneurs
- One person in charge
- Virtual

Opportunities:

- Leadership buy-in
- Dublin has a reputation and track record of retaining and supporting businesses
- Cohesive relationships among institutional heads

Threats:

- Lack of interest from entrepreneurs
- The digital divide

Recommended Action Steps:

- Dedicate a person with the Chamber of Commerce to entrepreneur development and support
- Develop an online Entrepreneur Gateway with access to resources
- Host an annual Business Plan Competition
- Host an annual idea symposium where entrepreneurs and all facets of the community have brainstorming

Access Dublin Services are organized around the following elements:

Small Business Consulting

The Access Dublin Business Specialist will assist new and existing business owners with support in the following areas:

- **Business Development**- including the feasibility and timing of their ideas, current state of operations, business and managerial skills necessary to success.
- **Marketing** – sharing information regarding the latest and greatest tools available to maintain a strong position in the market as well providing insight to new innovative practices that are working for similar companies across the state and worldwide.
- **Finance/Capital** – creating opportunities to explore finance generation mechanisms through local and national partnerships with finance programs, financial institutions and other capital origination vehicles.

Business Training

The Access Dublin Portal will house a listing of live and virtual training opportunities available to aspiring and established business owners. These training topics include but are not limited to:

- Business Operations and Management Practices
- Business Plan Development Services
- Effective Business Communication
- Presentation Skills
- Bookkeeping and Finance
- Human Resources and Personnel Practices
- Innovation and Optimization

Access to Regional Opportunities

The Access Dublin Portal and Business Specialist will serve as a clearinghouse of information by partnering with existing organizations to provide the latest and greatest information, resources and connections. Sample Partnerships include but are not limited to: Chamber of Commerce (Local, State and National), Development Authority, Banking and Financial Institutions, Community Organizations, Workforce Investment Boards, Incubators, Local & State Government Initiatives, Small Business Association,

Labor Department, Community Preservation Corporations, Education Services, United Way, Etc.

Access Dublin Web Portal Specifications

The Access Dublin Web Portal will contain the following components

- **About Access Dublin**- a brief overview of what this resource is, why its necessary and what benefits it provides to aspiring and established entrepreneurs
- **Welcome/Membership Sign-Up Page** - a page where basic info is provided by the aspiring or existing business owner to join the Access Dublin Community
- **Events**- A detailed listing of local business and training events
- **Get Help**- A page where individuals can place a request for the assistance they require. This will be the information gathering portion piece and the output will be sent to the Access Dublin Business Specialist who will direct the inquiry to the appropriate place/resources. Key Questions will include:
 - Participant Contact Information
 - Business Information (If Applicable)
 - Statistical/Demographic Data (How the heard about Access Dublin, Ethnicity, Household Size, etc.)
 - Personal Information (sample questions provided below)
 - *Describe the type of business you have or want to start.*
 - *Do you have any experience regarding this type of business, if so, explain.*
 - *Do you have a support system to encourage or assist you on your path to entrepreneurship? (family, friends etc.)*
 - *Are you currently employed outside of your business? If so, what availability you have to work on your project*
 - *Will you need financing for your project?*
 - *Is there any other information we should know to better assist you with your project?*
- **Programs**- A page listing Access Dublin's current programs that will assist aspiring and established business owners (i.e Business Plan Competition, Mentorship Program, Idea Symposium, etc.)
- **Success Stories**- A Page dedicated to share the success stories of individuals and businesses that have benefited from working with Access Dublin. This is the social proof that can be used to market and promote Why Do Business in Dublin and Laurens County

- **Resources-** A Page dedicated to providing the online training resources, an overview of how to get your business up and running, partnership listing, etc.
- **Marketplace-** A virtual marketplace where Access Dublin members can network, support each other and learn from one another regarding product and service offerings
- **Articles** – Valuable business articles and publications
- **Blogs-** An interactive page that is updated with the latest and greatest entrepreneurial information and tools presented in a fun and engaging way

Access Dublin Budget Items

Website Development and Maintenance

\$5,000 with \$500/yr maintenance

Access Dublin Business Specialist

- Central Point of Contact for Access Dublin
- Maintains and “Owns” Access Dublin Web Portal
- Answers and Fields Questions Appropriately
- Housed at the Chamber of Commerce
- *Proposed Annual Salary \$38K (based on national average and comparable community descriptions)*

The Business Plan Competition

- provides an opportunity for Dublin residents to stimulate and nourish the entrepreneurial spirit, bringing economic vitality to the downtown Dublin area. This competition seeks to:
- Encourage entrepreneurially-oriented residents to develop and grow new business ventures based on their own ideas and technologies.
- Provide the contestants with educational workshops that will enable them to start with a concept, develop an understanding of their market, analyze potential competitors, and create a marketing strategy for launching their business.
- Provide teams with a forum to present their ventures to industry professionals and investors. Constructive feedback should be given to increase the chance of successful launch of business ideas.

- Provide the best business plans with substantial resources to assist the winning teams with launching their ventures.

Timeline (including short, medium, and long-term goals/actions)

Short-term

- Host a meeting of all organization that provide service to businesses and entrepreneurs to gather information and share the vision for the project.
- Host the first idea symposium, where all members of the community are invited to share ideas for spurring business development in Dublin-Laurens County

Medium

- Develop the volunteer base for the consultants program and sponsors for the business plan competition
- Host the Business Plan Competition

Long Term

- Hire the Access Dublin Business Support Specialist
- Develop the online website portal

Potential Funding/Partnerships

- Kauffman Foundation
- USDA RBEG
- Small Business Development Center
- Small Business Administration

Measuring Impact

The Access Dublin Entrepreneur Gateway's success can be measured in several ways. The number of potential entrepreneurs touched by the information can be tracked via the online portal. Professional Consultants involved in the program can track hours volunteered to meet with entrepreneurs. The success of winners of the Business Plan Competition could also be an indicator of the success of the program. Once the Business Specialist is hired, he or she can keep track of time spent with clients and can track them through the startup process. The Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce's SEEDS Business Resource Center tracks clients and the number of information given to entrepreneurs.

Big Idea 2: *Dublin-Laurens County Workforce Alliance*



Goal

Create a Workforce Development Alliance comprised of a comprehensive delegation of community representatives from education, economic development, local governments, retirees, veterans, and various community based organizations dedicated to truly collaborative solutions for county-wide issues. This appointed alliance would foster open communication and eliminate much duplicity to increase economic prosperity and community enrichment. In the spirit of increasing international appeal, it is imperative for Dublin- Laurens County to establish a working group loyal to the development of a 21st century workforce, prepared for the current global economy.

Scope

The great recession of 2008 gave Dublin-Laurens County workforce system a new set of problems to focus on – unprecedented loss of jobs that will likely never be replaced, high unemployment, long-term job displacement for many workers, and stagnating income. Dynamic shifts are fundamentally restructuring the economy and the Workplace. The creation of a Workforce Development Alliance will assist in combating several hurdles to increasing international appeal for companies in Laurens County. Like many places across America there are several key traits prohibiting Laurens County from reaching its full potential. These barriers include; growing skill gaps, rapidly advancing technology, expanding globalization, demographic shifts, broken workforce pipeline, and lack of entrepreneurial skills. The result is that citizens seeking gainful employment and decent wages face greater challenges than ever before. At the same time, core beliefs about economic development strategies are shifting to a system which places a higher value on the quality and characteristics of the workforce than traditional strategies and tactics such as financial incentives and cheap labor. By incorporating a truly robust “team” structure, historical sensitivities between County and City may drastically subside and without doubt, diminish various duplications of services.

Recommendation SWOT

Strengths

- Fosters unrivaled spirit of partnership
- Increases open communication and familiarity with developments across the County
- Ushers in a refreshing avant garde of community engagement and enrichment ideas.
- Cost effective
- Work smarter not harder approach
- Maximizes technical assistance, funding opportunities, and best practices

Weaknesses

- Effective only if cohesive and active participation
- Voluntary
- Establishing structure and mechanisms for implementation.

Opportunities

- New voices and ideas at the table
- Increased buy-in from community
- Leadership Development
- Integrated Sustainability

Threats

- Promulgates community division, harming future collaboration
- Creates new barriers

Recommended Action Steps

- Hire economic development liaison representing the Technical College, Middle State, and the Dublin-Laurens County Development Authority to coordinate potential clients workforce needs and curriculum adaptation.
- Promote, expand, and improve current educational opportunities to maximize greatest environment for fostering a highly-skilled, globally relevant workforce
- Hold quarterly “Idea symposiums”. Incorporate a day-long workshop evaluating and recommending best ideas for new project developments through the Workforce Development Alliance.
- Leadership Apprenticeships

Workforce Development Alliance is organized around the following elements:

Educational & Industrial development Liaison

The educational & industrial liaison will function as the bridge between industry needs and educational curriculum compatibility. The EIDL would support the Colleges' missions by serving as the liaison with business, industry, educational, and economic development organizations throughout Dublin- Laurens County. EIDL would work to initiate, refine, and deliver programs which support a well-trained workforce and to enhance the economic growth and community development of the region.

The EIDL and WDA would develop education investment strategies to improve defined learning outcomes through public schools, colleges and universities cognizant of emerging industry needs. The EIDL would ensure those not in the education system would have the foundational skills to compete for the middle-skill and technical jobs needed to fill the current and projected skills shortage. The WDA at the local level will leverage activities and resources to support the movement of Lauren Countians up the ladder of self-sufficiency while aligning with the vision and desired outcomes of the state's education system.

Leadership Apprenticeships

The City of Dublin has a rather large surplus and Laurens County has struggled financially for many years. The Mayor of the City, the City Manager, and almost every head of City Departments are all poised to retire within the next five years with no succession plan in place for replacements. The County has leadership in place but doesn't have the financial resources. The DDA, Development Authority, Chamber, Rec Dept, and a few additional agencies are already somewhat consolidated with members from both city and county. Essentially the City has a lot of depth but doesn't have future leaders in place. The County has the leadership but doesn't have the depth due to financial constraints. A marriage between the two could solve a lot of problems.

- Youth Mentorship- Adopt a program by which students from Dublin are partnered up with County government officials and vice versa for County students. This will undoubtedly create mutual appreciation for inspiring young leaders. Possible high school/college credit.
- Model LC- Using Model UN as a template, entice schools to participate in a mock city council/ county commission/ school board meetings, etc. formulating solutions based off problems provided by local elected officials. Not only is this a valuable lesson in civics and governance, but improves connections between various generations.

- Leadership Camp Scholarships- Ideally for economically challenged/ at risk youth, have various organizations/individuals hold fundraisers to provide several scholarships to promising youth who show a passion for community economic development.

21st Century Education Improvements

The Heart of Georgia College and Career Academy (HGCCA)

HGCCA is a regional consolidated charter half-day program for students to pursue Global Logistics and Innovations in Science and Technology curriculum. HGCCA is independent from local school charters and will follow a business-type workplace environment. Currently, Dublin City, the Laurens County, Bleckley County, and Wheeler County are in a joint partnership.

Goals

- Instill relevant technical skills and workplace ethics
- Offer a consolidated advanced academic program that is cost effective o be able to fund high level Advance Placement (AP) classes.
- HGCCA will have a separate governing board
- Robust workforce development, with a curriculum that changes depending on industry needs in this area.
- Quick implementation of industry-approved/chosen program that can support workforce needs in 30-40 days.

The benefits of the HGCCA

Resource management

- Most of the board of the Academy feels there is a lot to be gained from consolidation due to the pooling of resources.

Streamlining education

- Students earn dual-enrollment credits with Middle Georgia State College and Oconee Fall Line Technical College

Creating job opportunity and economic prosperity

- Full-time teachers will be hired
- More people will be participating in local economy

Exclusivity in marketplace

- Dublin and Gwinnett are only ones offering

The obstacles of the HGCCA

Lack of awareness/education about HGCCA

- At a recent meeting to introduce parents to the program, turnout was low. Only 10-15 parents were there
- Those parents had little overall knowledge about the HGCCA's objectives

Funding. HGCCA obtained a \$3M grant to get the facility going, but more investment will be needed to ensure ongoing development of initiative.

- Full-time employees expected to be hired per student enrolled
- Graduation rates expected to increase, but with schools in the area dropping out due to funding concerns, this will be a challenge.
- Industry financial support low due to economic downturn
- Telfair & Dodge have dropped out due to concerns over funding.

Needs verbal support from community.

- As eluded above, there are concerns over turf protection within the city/county that oppose any type of consolidated effort.
- Principals not wanting kids to leave their schools to attend the career academy 1/2 a day, which eventually will result in some loss of funding for that student.

Political pushback

- There has been some political push back on HGCCA which goes back to the school consolidation debate.

The IB Program

The IB program is a Swiss program which is focused on process (AP classes focus on content) which prepares students with the necessary skills to prosper in a global economy.

Goals

- Start program next fall with 10-15 kids enrolled
- In the ten year horizon, Dr. Ledbetter also hopes to offer an IB world elementary school in addition to the middle and high grade offerings.

The benefits of IB in Dublin

- Only program in this area other than one in Macon and one in Savannah
- Big attraction to European companies: Dr. Ledbetter who hailed from Alabama specifically mentioned that Mercedes refused to locate their plant in a town where there was not an IB program offered.
- Program extension down to the middle grades which will be a preparatory course load for the Jr/Sr diploma tract they will eventually enter.

The obstacles of the IB program

Awareness

- Dr. Ledbetter says many in the community not familiar with the program.

Funding

- Cost of program is \$80 to \$100k per year. Biggest cost is training the teachers with the end result being such a small class.

Marketing to big business

- When asked about the biggest barriers/issues, the IB program will face - Dr. Ledbetter says the most important thing is getting the program a raised profile. He said many in the community are not even familiar with the program. He also emphasized how important it would be to market the program to potential international business.

Workforce Development Alliance Budget Items

- Education and Industrial Development Liaison (EIDL): \$38,000
- Funding for scholarships for Leadership Camp: approx. \$20,000

Timeline (Short, Medium, and long term goals and actions)

Short-term

- Hold meeting with all local elected officials, government agencies, educational leadership (K-12, Tech School, and University), and community based organizations, economic developers, international citizens and lending institutions. Pitch the Workforce Development Alliance.
- Hold effective and inclusive outreach events highlighting significance and possibilities of expanding Career Academy and IB Program. Highlight nation-wide success stories and relevance to 21st century workforce development
- Gauge interest with local leaders, youth organizations, churches, guidance counselors, and non-profits on the creation of leadership apprenticeships and Model LC.
- Create position description for ideal EIDL. Draft roles and responsibilities with recommendations from development agencies, educational and industrial representatives.

Medium

- Determine organizations/companies/entities vital to WDA. Appoint permanent members and substitutes so that full representation will be achieved at all meetings
- Analyze economic impact and define enrollment numbers required in the IB and WA for maintaining financial solvency and liquidity.
- Form Leadership Apprenticeship fundraising committee; identify best leadership camps in the country and price. Develop curriculum and structure of Model LC. Draft application form and metrics defining ideal candidates.
- Determine salary and cost sharing mechanisms from various agencies.

Long

- Vote on charter, governing rules, and authority. Develop clear roles of responsibilities, accountability mechanisms, and monthly rotating venues to provide accessibility for all citizens to attend. Establish open forums of communication and public distributions of meeting information and agenda items. Fine tune sectors of action/impact.
- Secure funding. Business support. State education compliance. Market to international businesses

- Garner community support from all corners by effectively marketing this incredible opportunity and even some grassroots fundraising. Solicit sponsors from public and private institutions/individuals. Selection process and determining which camp to attend.
- Hire most qualified applicant

Potential Funding/Partnerships

- Dept. of Housing and Urban Development
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities
- Environmental Protection Agency
- United States Dept. of Agriculture
- Economic Development Agency
- Small Business Administration
- Dept. of Commerce
- Dept. of Treasury
- Dept. of Transportation
- Dept. of Labor
- Dept. of Justice

Measuring Impact

The effectiveness of the Dublin-Laurens County Workforce Development Alliance can best be measured in the overall increase of businesses relocating or starting-up in Laurens County. With a more comprehensive partnership and leveraging of resources, the WDA would multiply the incentives offered to attract new businesses to Laurens County. In addition, a spirit of healthy competition could be ignited amongst the city and county participants, which would ultimately benefit the bottom-line, new businesses. To monitor the impact of expanding and improving the IB and Career Academy, close attention would be paid to increases in enrollment numbers, sponsoring industries, and post-secondary education enrollment.

Big Idea 3: *Develop a Thriving Arts Scene Downtown Dublin to Boost Tourism and Attract Retirees*



Goal

The recommendation is to create a thriving arts scene in Dublin to provide cultural and educational offerings to baby boomers approaching retirement age.

Scope

Community and business leaders in Dublin/Laurens County have recently placed a concerted focus on attracting retirees to the community. A 2013 study by the UGA Selig Center for Economic Growth titled “Golden Rules” provides an evaluation of retiree-based economic development in Georgia and suggests that the timing is right for rural communities to focus on retiree attraction. “Demographic and economic trends are coming together to create an excellent opportunity for retiree-based economic development. The retirement of baby

boomers is a strong demographic trend that is virtually locked in until approximately 2028.” Communities reap many rewards for retiree attraction and retention. Retirees generally have more expendable income to put back in the local economy and also enjoy civic involvement and participation. Both the financial and time resources that retirees bring to the table can really strengthen a community’s position.

The AARC (American Association of Retirement Communities) Seal of Approval program recognizes communities who have made a commitment to a “best in class” lifestyle for retirees. This program serves as an endorsement of sorts for communities seeking retirees. Dublin is the first community in Georgia to obtain the seal of approval. Low cost of living and advantageous tax structures have already put Georgia on the map as a popular retirement destination. Local business leaders have already

capitalized on this by developing housing communities in Dublin marketed towards retirees. The median housing prices are well below the national average of \$207k and many options are available from rural farming land to downtown loft living. The healthcare system in Dublin is well known for excellence in health care with per capita access to doctors being extremely high. Both Fairview Park Hospital and the Carl Vinson VA Medical Center are located in Dublin and both are instrumental in recruiting healthcare professionals to the community. Dublin/Laurens County already has the tools to support an influx of retirees to the area which turns the focus of our scope to how to get them there.

Amenity seeking retirees are frequently drawn to the same place that attracts tourists. An article published by the Georgia Municipal Association in April 2014 titled "Downtown Redevelopment and Retiree Attraction: Good Timing" points out that tourism is a natural catalyst to retiree attraction. Bolstering tourism will not only increase traffic from potential retirees looking to relocate but also will strengthen the local economy. "Baby Boomers are now looking for a place to enjoy. Community and business leaders in places such as the coastal towns of Myrtle Beach, Hilton Head, and Bluffton, SC are looking to the growing retirement community to help rekindle local economies. They're rethinking sporting and shopping developments, as well as arts centers, to attract on-the-go-retirees looking for an array of easily accessible activities." While Senior Centers and other facilities have been popular vehicles in other communities to create amenities packages customized for retirees; aging baby boomers will likely redefine a retirement lifestyle as one that cannot be confined to the walls of a senior center. The US News article titled "10 Ways Baby Boomers will reinvent retirement" points out that baby boomers do not see retirement as the end of an activity but rather a new adventure. Seniors enjoy travel, volunteering, being active, and learning new hobbies. "It is a generation that is far more comfortable and even addicted in some ways to change and newness and adventures. They are going to pioneer a lifestyle where people reinvent themselves again and again and again."

A tool that is commonly used in downtown revitalization and tourism that has not been leveraged in Dublin is the arts scene. A contribution from the art scene to the already aggressive downtown revitalization taking place could be a perfect marriage. Communities such as Dublin that are focused on attracting retirees will have to make sure they have a thriving cultural and arts scene and can provide opportunities for active retiring baby boomers. Developing a thriving cultural arts scene in downtown Dublin will have a multi pronged effect on the community. If structured correctly, it can catapult downtown development, attract entrepreneurs and young professionals and in turn create resources for international companies. All of these things make for a very powerful economy which creates a multitude of resources and opportunities for retirees.

Recommended Action Steps

1. **Continue to build upon extensive downtown redevelopment by subsidizing rent for artisan retailers.** In exchange for rent support, artists will be required to invest their sweat equity into rehabilitating storefront spaces. As the appearance of storefronts improves, downtown activity will increase making downtown a tourism magnet. This will also continue to improve the aesthetics of downtown so retirees will be able to see themselves walking the streets and living here.
2. **Create an “artist in residence” program downtown.** This program will integrate a visiting artist into the community through art exhibits and classes. In exchange for housing and gallery space, the artists will be required to assist the community in a variety of ways based on their individual interests and skill sets. A comprehensive program of classes will be offered covering a wide range of skills from jewelry making to woodworking. Class offerings will be available at no cost to seniors and at risk youth.
3. **Develop a downtown art incubator and cultural center to house the residency program and art exhibits on Main Street.** The incubator space will offer a shared common studio and workspace for artisans which can be rented at a low monthly cost or even subsidized in exchange for personal contributions. The cultural center will include display and retail space for local and visiting artists as well as the artist in residence program. The cultural center will be the primary catalyst for Dublin tourism and retiree attraction.
4. **Host a monthly arts event to highlight the arts such as a “Sip and See” night.** Local downtown restaurants and retailers will partner up for food and beverage offerings and the Tourism Council will market the event statewide to the art community. Events such as this will bring an influx of visitors to the city, a large population of which will be baby boomers and retirees.
5. **Establish a Downtown Arts & Commerce Alliance.** The Alliance will be charged with fundraising for the arts program and overseeing the incubator and cultural center. The Alliance will also be integral in working with the DDA to host events and cultural offerings at Theater Dublin.

Timeline (including short, medium, and long-term goals/actions)

Short-term

- Identify available retail space on Main Street that can be subsidized and made available to an artist in exchange for rehabilitation of storefront space downtown. Offer services to all current retailers at no cost to them to standardize and uniform look of downtown. Host a Sip & See at the artist's shop to encourage support and build buzz.
- Develop the Downtown Arts & Commerce Alliance to spearhead oversight of initiative and fundraising for downtown art incubator and cultural center.

Medium

- Identify space for and develop a recruiting program for the artists in residence program.
- Develop a community arts calendar through the Downtown Alliance that includes events aimed at all ages. Develop a regional marketing campaign to promote events.

Long Term

- Identify and rehab space for the art incubator and cultural center. Appoint an executive director to oversee the center and other arts initiatives.
- Host downtown arts festival and promote statewide to the arts community.

Possible Funding/Partnerships/Resources

- Georgia Council for the Arts
- Georgia Department of Economic Development, Tourism Product Development Grant
- Department of Community Affairs, Downtown Development

Acknowledgement of Stakeholders, Contributors, Residents and Officials

- Gerald Smith, Dublin City Council
- Bryan Rogers, Laurens County Administrator
- Buddy Adams, Laurens County Commissioner
- George Roussel, Dublin City Manager
- Curtis Edwards, Dublin City Council
- DuBose Porter, Chairman Georgia Democratic Party
- Matt Hatchett, State Representative District 150
- Willie Paulk, President, Dublin-Laurens County Chamber of Commerce
- Cal Wray, formerly of Dublin-Laurens County Development Authority
- Tara Bradshaw, Director, Main Street Dublin
- Joshua Kight, Director, Downtown Development Authority
- Jeff Daves, Alterra Networks
- Scott Thompson, Dublin-Laurens County Historical Society
- Bill Brown, Chairman, Visit Dublin
- Louis Curry, MSD
- Mike Notartomaso, Board of Directors, AARC
- Rebecca McWilliams, Laurens County Tourism Manager
- Dr. Chuck Ledbetter, Dublin City Schools
- Ted Short, Fairview Hospital