

**Objective: Develop the Oxford Town Center to serve residents and visitors.**

Based upon meetings between Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) staff and representatives from the City of Oxford, the following are the four (4) main steps recommended for implementing the Oxford Town Center vision.

Step 1: Identify Implementing Agency*Option A: City*

Should the City choose to implement the Town Center Development Strategy under its existing structure, it is recommended that a stakeholder committee be formed to oversee the process. At a minimum, this committee should include representatives from both Oxford College and the City of Oxford. A regular meeting schedule and set of performance metrics should be established to encourage consistent progress. Reports should be made on a quarterly basis to City Council.

Timeline: 2 months

*Option B: Downtown Development Authority*

The City may create a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) for the purpose of implementing the Town Center Development Strategy and other similar projects. DDAs were created by the General Assembly of the State of Georgia for every municipality, but must be activated by local resolution. This resolution must identify the need for the DDA, designate its geographic jurisdiction, and appoint the initial Board of Directors. The City must then file the resolution with the Secretary of State and the Department of Community Affairs. Upon creation, it is recommended that the DDA adopt a work plan and report progress on a quarterly basis to City Council.

The required seven (7) members of the DDA Board of Directors must be taxpayers residing in the City or owners of businesses located within the DDA area who live in the County. At least four (4) directors must have an economic interest in the DDA area. One (1) director may be appointed who lives outside the County, but must be an owner of a business within the DDA area and be a Georgia resident. No more than one (1) member of the governing authority may serve on the Board.

Timeline: 6 months

(See Attachment A for more detail regarding DDA requirements and powers. Also available is a presentation assembled by Dan McCrae, partner at Seyfarth and Shaw, LLP, entitled, "The DNA of Your DDA" at <http://danmccrae.com/whitepapers/20140720/The-DNA-of-Your-DDA.pdf>.)

## Step 2: Designate Project Manager/Management Team

### *Option A: City Manager*

Should the City desire to rely only on in-house resources for managing the Town Center Development Strategy, it is recommended that the City Council identify a specific percentage of work time that the City Manager should dedicate to the project. Reports should be made to the City Council on a regular (monthly or quarterly) basis.

Timeline: 1 month

### *Option B: Hire Economic/Community Development Director*

Should the City determine a need in the immediate or distant future that a new staff position should be created to assist with implementing the Town Center Development Strategy and similar projects, several sample job descriptions are included in Attachment B.

### *Option C: Contract for certain project development/management services*

The City may choose to proceed with a team-based approach by contracting for certain services with either a private firm or NEGRC. In either instance, it is recommended that responsibilities for implementing the Town Center Development Strategy are clearly articulated for each party.

Timeline – Private Firm: 2-3 months for development of a request for qualifications (RFQ), advertising, selection, and contract development/execution

Timeline – NEGRC: 1-2 months for request letter and memorandum of agreement (MOA) development/execution

Potential Partners: Private planning and development firm, NEGRC

## Step 3: Finalize Ownership and Market Property

### *Option A: Parcels to sell*

Should the City opt to sell parcels in the Town Center district to encourage development, it is recommended that a formal request for proposals (RFP) for property acquisition and site development be issued. (See Attachment C for examples.) In order to assemble this RFP, it is recommended that the City's

engineer be engaged to develop basic reference maps illustrating the available properties. The City may also choose to request the assistance of the NEGRC for managing the RFP process.

Timeline: 3 months

Potential Partners: City engineer, NEGRC

*Option B: Parcels to retain*

The Project Manager should utilize the *Oxford Retail Market Profile* (Attachment D) during outreach to potential business or development investors. If, after six months to one year, there are no interested parties, the City should hire a real estate broker to assist with marketing the properties.

Timeline: 1 year

Potential Partners: Commercial real estate broker

Step 4: Construct Public Infrastructure

Upon determining the ownership structure, it is recommended that the City make a detailed list of all public infrastructure and other components to be provided as amenities to the Town Center properties. These amenities should then be included in marketing materials for the properties.

It is recommended that the City then establish a schedule for construction of the publicly-funded components. This schedule should be updated regularly and shared with the designated implementing agency and project manager/management team for use in soliciting business and development partners for the Town Center.

Potential partners: Private business or developer

**Comparison Communities**

In order to better evaluate market possibilities for businesses in the Town Center, the City of Oxford was compared to four similar communities. Each is a considerably small town that is home to a small, church-affiliated college or university. Unlike Oxford, none of the identified communities are situated immediately adjacent to a city the size of Covington, at just over 13,000 persons (2010 U.S. Census).

	Land area (sq mi)	College	2010 Pop	2014 Pop	% Change 2010-2014	College Enrollment	Ratio of 2014 Pop to Enrolled Students	2014 Med HH Income	2010 Median Age	2014 Median Age	% Change	2014 Average Home Value	2014 White Collar Employment	2014 Blue Collar Employment	2014 Services Employment	DDA?
Demorest, GA	2.3	Piedmont College	1823	1984	8.8	1290	28:1	\$35,477	25.9	32.4	25.1	\$136,229	57.2%	31.5%	18.4%	Y*
Waleska, GA	1.5	Reinhardt University	644	651	1.1	1428	42:1	\$59,361	21.9	39	78.1	\$193,750	60.5%	21.4%	18.1%	N
Louisburg, NC	2.3	Louisburg College	3359	3354	-0.2	700	45:1	\$31,559	38	38.3	0.8	\$177,136	47.3%	30.3%	22.4%	N
Mars Hill, NC	1.9	Mars Hill University	1869	1955	4.6	1440	28:1	\$40,158	24.2	36.7	51.7	\$210,260	53.6%	20.6%	25.8%	N
Oxford, GA	2.6	Oxford College of Emory University	2134	2148	0.7	947	37:1	\$35,290	24.4	28.8	18.0	\$123,500	47.1%	26.1%	26.8%	N

\*It is uncertain how or whether the City of Demorest uses its DDA, but it is registered with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs as of December 1, 2014.

Amenities

*Recreation*

Demorest Springs Park is situated on the city’s main thoroughfare, Old Historic US 441, adjacent to Piedmont College. Reinhardt University, in Waleska, boasts 7 miles of biking and hiking trails on its campus; primitive campus campsites are available for use by students. Also in Waleska are two parks on either end of the city limits containing ball fields, tennis and basketball courts, a splash pad, playgrounds, picnic areas, and walking trails.

Louisburg, North Carolina, has a Recreation Director on staff and a separate Parks and Recreation Facebook page. Facilities include two parks containing soccer fields, walking trails, and conservation areas; a 2.2-mile paved bike trail; and a skateboard park. Basketball hoops are also installed next to the police station for use during daylight hours.

The City of Mars Hill, North Carolina, operates Recreation Park, situated outside the municipal boundary. The park is not accessible via sidewalk from Mars Hill University or elsewhere within the city. On campus, there is a 0.5-mile hiking trail near the athletic fields.

### *Technology*

Wireless internet access is available to some degree on all campuses; in some cases, it is on a building-by-building basis. There is no indication that the digital technologies utilized on these campuses are available to residents or visitors unaffiliated with the college or university. None of the communities identified offer internet service to their residents or businesses.

---

Utilizing Esri Business Analyst software, NEGRC compared these five communities in terms of business mix and market potential for retail and restaurants. (See Attachment E for all data retrieved and analyzed during this process.)

### Business Mix

The top industry classification in Oxford is Administrative/Support/Waste Management/Remediation Services. This category includes call centers, landscaping services, travel agencies, pest control, and janitorial services, among others. (Some of the Oxford College administrative staff may be classified under this category, with others falling under Educational Services or Public Administration.) The second most common industry classification is tied between Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (e.g. lawyers, architects, research & development) and Construction (including specialty trade contractors such as electricians, plumbers, and painters). Third on the list of top industries in Oxford is Other Services, which includes establishments providing repair and maintenance services, religious organizations, beauty salons/barber shops, and households employing domestic personnel. **Comparatively, Retail Trade is included in each of the four peer communities' top three industries.**

## Market Potential

**With regard to Retail and Restaurant Market behaviors, the City of Waleska shares the most in common with Oxford.** Of the three types of clothing purchase behaviors measured (men's, women's, or for children under 13 years old), Demorest, Mars Hill, and Waleska each exhibit higher than U.S. average market potential for one; Oxford, however exhibits higher than U.S. average for all three.

In general, **the residents of Oxford are more likely than residents of the four peer communities to dine out.** They are more likely to have gone to a family restaurant or steakhouse within the last six months, and also slightly more likely to have gone at least four times per month. A greater proportion of Oxford residents visit fast food/drive-in restaurants, order home delivery, and pick up take-out.

In comparison to the peer communities, Oxford uniquely showed **higher than U.S. average market potential** in the following consumer behaviors:

### *Entertainment*

- Went to bar/night club in last 12 months
- Own digital single-lens reflex (SLR) camera
- Played a video/electronic game (portable or console) in last 12 months
- Household owns a video game system
- Read any daily newspaper (paper version)

### *Food/Drink*

- Drank beer/ale in last 6 months
- Dined out in last 12 months

### *Household Management*

- Had tune-up in last 12 months
- Have home mortgage (1st)
- Purchased low ticket household furnishings in last 12 months
- Household has cell phone only (no landline telephone)

*General*

- Have savings account
- Likely to buy a brand that supports a charity

**Local Economic Development Recommendations**

Upon completion of the four (4) steps identified on pages 1–3, above, the implementing agency (City or DDA) and the Project Manager should consider the following suggestions for attracting businesses to the Oxford Town Center.

- Target small businesses and entrepreneurs offering goods or services relating to consumer behaviors listed above and the demographics of Oxford residents.
- Contact food and technology business incubators to communicate opportunities for retail and/or office space
- Share the *Oxford Retail Market Profile* with the Georgia Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for access to participants in small business start-up and business planning classes.
- Establish regular communications with the Commercial Development staff at the Covington-Newton Chamber of Commerce Office of Economic Development.
- Offer “pop-up” retail space to allow start-up businesses to test the local market. Space might be found in existing city buildings or local businesses, including galleries. Modified shipping containers and mobile home trailers might be used as pop-up retail space for rent on the Town Center properties.