

# Downtown Selma Innovation District Placemaking Plan







#### A word from a Selma resident

CORI's Innovation District Placemaking Plan aligns with Selma's potential at the perfect time: opportunities in the historic riverfront district are coming to fruition and the 60th anniversary of Selma-to-Montgomery March will be celebrated in March 2025. The plan aptly points out the need for Selma to capitalize on its cultural heritage which will benefit both residents and visiting tourists.

There is so much untapped history in the Innovation District that contributes to what Bryan Stevenson of the Equal Justice Initiative calls "authenticity of place," Selma has the potential to educate the world on the century between the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement. Much of this could take place in the Innovation District between the Edmund Pettus Bridge and Foot Soldiers' Park, as historical structures are restored to provide mixed-use space while telling the history of Selma which is a microcosm of American history. From antebellum hotels and a Civil War-era foundry, to the site of the Freedmen's Bureau office during Reconstruction, to a 1930s respite space for African Americans during segregation, to the offices of SNCC in the Sullivan Building, to GWC Homes and Brown A.M.E. Chapel, there is a wealth of opportunity to tell this history all within the walking distance of the Innovation District.

This plan enumerates the ways in which strategic investments in the downtown infrastructure can result in realizing Selma's potential. Projects like adding wayfinding signs, the further development of the Riverfront Park, and developing ordinances to encourage local entrepreneurs to participate are all valuable ways to realize this potential. With city officials, local leaders, and local entrepreneurs working in collaboration for Selma's future, it will be exciting to see what Selma looks like at the 70th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery March.

> Sincerely, Sarah Aghedo

Selma & Dallas County United Way Board Member



## **Executive summary**

The Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) is pleased to present the Innovation District Placemaking Plan to the City of Selma, Alabama. This plan serves as a blueprint for practical and achievable placemaking initiatives.

The goal of the Plan is to communicate a vision for a five-year placemaking program to a wide audience who may partner, implement, fund, and enjoy all that the "innovation district" of Selma has to offer. The objectives that come from the vision—cultivate small actions that build local pride, focus on community in the core, attract tourists beyond the bridge, and foster regional cooperation—are supported by 12 placemaking actions that range from easy, low cost, and quick implementation to longer term ones that require greater funding and coordination.

The Plan is for city officials, downtown building owners, nonprofit leaders, downtown employees, community members, and anyone else who shares the vision that downtown Selma should be a place of possibility and innovation for everyone. The objectives cover

a diverse range of topics, from public space to public-facing businesses to wayfinding signage to historic structures to places that foster innovation. The actions include ones that anyone can take and others that are best considered by specific organizations and individuals.

This Plan builds upon the groundwork laid by the City Council, local nonprofits, and countless dedicated individuals involved in previous placemaking and downtown redevelopment efforts. Their collective endeavors have positioned Selma for a promising future, and this Plan aims to further advance the city's trajectory towards success.

#### **About this plan**

The Selma Innovation District Place-making Plan is the culmination of extensive research, on-site place assessments, community consultation, a survey, and two workshops conducted in Selma in 2023.

The Plan, city-wide priorities, and placemaking actions identified within are informed by a shared vision and four objectives vetted by community stakeholders.

The funding for the development of this plan came from the USDA, through their 2022 Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge grant. This opportunity for Selma was initially made possible thanks to the support of Jimmie Coleman at Total Management Experts.

#### Methodology overview

The project methodology was based on proven community development approaches, combining collaborative processes with placemaking mentoring, prototyping, and evaluation.

Community engagement was undertaken between July 2023 and August 2024 to generate awareness of placemaking opportunities in Selma. Pilot projects were undertaken to test community interest in leading placemaking actions.

Surveys and interviews support the development of the shared vision for Selma and determine feasible placemaking actions that foster an inclusive innovation district.

## **Rural challenges**

When the 2008 recession occurred, many jobs were lost. By 2013, jobs in metropolitan areas had recovered and have continued to grow. Rural job numbers still haven't recovered in many places. Selma, for instance, continues to have one of the highest unemployment figures in the state<sup>1</sup>.

Metro and rural areas experienced significant job losses in the manufacturing sector over the past 20 years, but rural communities, unlike metro areas, have not offset these losses through job growth in the professional and business services sectors, including tech.

#### Why do tech jobs matter?

Rural America has 12% of the workforce, but only 5% of the nation's tech jobs, many of which bring in salaries of \$78,000 or more per year. For Dallas County, only 0.7% of workers are employed in tech, compared to 4% of their urban counterparts. In a place where the average income is closer to \$23,000, a deficit of high-paying jobs impacts the entire local economy.

Furthermore, for every tech role at a company, there is often a non-tech role in sales, operations, design, etc. These jobs expand the demand locally for retail, restaurants, healthcare, and other roles. With tech jobs being ones that people can enter from non-traditional education pathways, rural

communities with strong broadband have the opportunity to add capacity and thrive. However, attracting or retaining tech workers is a lot easier in rural places that have a strong sense of community and a high quality of life.

## What is placemaking?

In short, placemaking is "people-powered public space design."

In other words: it's a method of community planning that empowers local people to participate in the creation of physical spaces that better meet their needs. This collaborative process involves a range of stakeholders, place users, and place managers in the design, planning, development, and creation of public and public-facing places.

Through the process of placemaking, participants are delegated power to shape their community, and in doing so, they develop a shared responsibility for their local places as well as a deeper connection to the community that surrounds them.

The community-building that comes about from participating in placemaking activities creates a positive feedback loop: Most people are drawn to places that other people are enjoying, and when new people interact in a space with others, community bonds are forged.

Thus, the simple act of people being together in space for even the smallest of projects has a ripple effect on those people, along with anyone who sees them or hears about the project.

Projects implemented without community involvement are likely to miss out on this peer-to-peer buzz.

#### Why rural placemaking?

Placemaking is typically associated with efforts to improve urban communities' walkability, safety, and access to services. However, placemaking benefits rural communities too. Aside from job opportunities, many people who leave their rural towns cite a lack of "things to do" as a reason to go elsewhere.

Having a variety of activities to participate in, especially ones that were created with community needs in mind, can improve a rural place's ability to draw in or keep community members.

Additionally, participating in placemaking builds leadership skills and project management capacity within a community — something that many rural places, where one person might wear several civic and volunteer hats, are often in need of.

## Placemaking and innovation districts in rural towns



"The new innovation districts will be more like the market districts of a hundred years ago than the financial districts of fifty years ago." -Ramon Marrades, Chief Strategy Officer at La Marina de València in Barcelona, Spain

This is good news for many rural down-towns. Featuring blocks of mixed-use multi-story buildings, a relatively high density, and a lower cost of living than their metropolitan counterparts, many "micropolitan" cities, including the City of Selma, have the bones of a good market district in place of a spiritless financial district or the neighborhood-cleaving interstate that often served it.

Furthermore, with the rise of remote work, a trend reversal has begun to take place: some young people are moving back to their hometowns, while newcomers or second-home-owners have made a permanent shift to the slower pace of life found in the countryside.

Innovation districts have the potential to spur economic development that is resilient and inclusive. With a renewed interest in rural places, it's a great time to foster the conditions that make one possible.

A successful innovation district has lively public places and low barriers to entry. They often feature open-ended spaces that respond to the needs of people as producers and innovators, not just consumers.

In these places of possibility, "weak ties" between strangers can be formed and "strong ties" between collaborators can be strengthened, highlighting a complex social web where commercial and social exchanges blend together. To support "strong tie"-based innovation, successful districts often feature a cluster of businesses or individuals engaged in the same industry, facilitating resource and knowledge sharing. In a rural community, this likely includes people who engage in that industry as a hobby, too.

For the would-be innovator, the lower cost of living, ease of building relationships, and access to resources in a space that reinforces the idea that "anything is possible" make a rural innovation district an ideal place to grow.

## Innovation district project stakeholders

To inform the development of this placemaking plan, a number of stakeholders across Selma were engaged. They completed worksheets, participated in workshops, tested "Lighter Quicker Cheaper" (LQC) placemaking actions, and reviewed this plan.

#### **Stakeholders**

Jimmie Coleman · Lydia Chatmon · Sheryl Smedley · Jackie Smith · Denisha Hendricks · Chardae Austin • Susan Youngblood • Letti Hasberry • Sylvia Smith • Celestria Hill • Alan Reese · Marvin Reese · Anastasia Barnes Holmes · Monique Walls · Charlene Reese · Frances Reese · A C Reeves · Helene Taylor · Amanda Smith · Tina Jones · Edith Coleman · John Kinnerson Jr. • Martha Lockett • Danielle Wooten

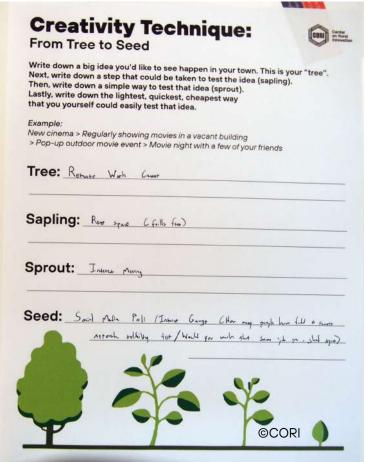








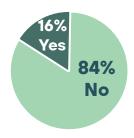




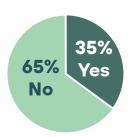
## **Community input**

Feedback on the ideas in this plan were solicited from the general public at a Levitt Amp Concert in July and through an online survey.

#### I'd be there a lot more if it had...



Do people in Selma see opportunities for themselves here?



Do you feel that improvements to downtown have positively impacted you?



Restaurants Cleaner bars, and public food trucks places Live Updated music store fronts



"I wish there were more welcoming shops with evening hours and events."

"There is glass on sidewalks

and potholes in the streets;

parks are usually not main-

to new buildings on the edge of town back around 2000 would mean that restaurants and retail have more clientele at lunch."

"A return of agencies that moved

"Selma looks like an old abandoned town just stuck in time."

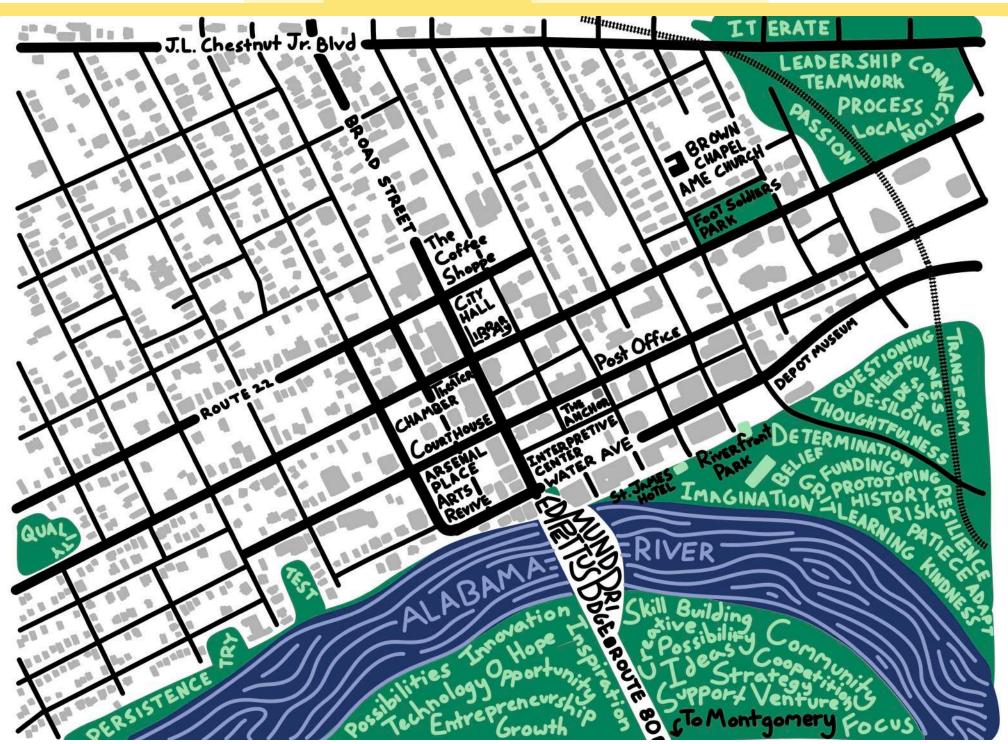
"Businesses are too spread out. Not very walkable" "Without a solid public-private partnership, it is hard to imagine the downtown area improving." "For visitors, there are very few signs, even street signs, to tell them where they are."

> "There is not much to draw anyone there."

"Bring back downtown shopping and eateries, make it the center of public life again."

"Without code enforcement, many buildings sit unattended and abandoned by their owners."





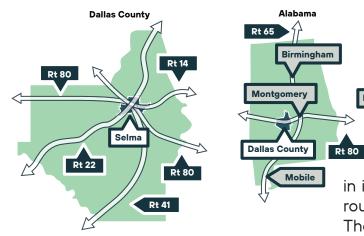
# = Innovation District = Downtown Market conditions and transportation methods are often primary drivers for how space is arranged and how people use it

for business purposes. As a place chartered in the early 1800's, the heart of innovation in Selma has leapt around as the transportation of goods shifted from wagons to steam boats to trains to trucks to WiFi.

The Innovation District overlaps with the "Water Avenue Historic District" and part of the "Old Town Historic District". It is shown in dark green above, and is where much of the region used to converge for work.

In the surrounding downtown areas, shown in light green, multiple revitalization efforts have been taking place.

#### Selma in context



In the mid 1800's, the City of Selma was the center of trade in central-west Alabama and the fourth wealthiest county in the country. This was due to its location along the Alabama River, fertile soil, and a large population of enslaved people farming cotton under the threat of violence.

The emancipation of Black people who had been enslaved, opportunities in northern cities, and an increase in transportation options reduced Selma's concentration of people, goods, and services. At the same time, the city's footprint expanded from 460 acres to more than 9000. Yet, the initial land grant along what European settlers once called "Moore's Bluff"—the blocks that weave around the northern side of the Edmund Pettus bridge—remains the gravitational center of the city and of Dallas County.

Many people who live in surrounding towns work in one of its four industrial parks or shop

in its downtown. This is made possible by route 80 and many secondary highways. The state's third most populous city, Montgomery, is only 50 miles east.

Alabama

Southeast

New Orleans within 5 hours

Nashville within 5 hours

Atlanta within 3 hours

Within the context of the Southeast, it has convenient road connections to Birmingham, Huntsville, Atlanta, Montgomery, and Nashville: places where expenses might be outweighing opportunities in the work-fromanywhere age. While places like Atlanta may remain as traditional centers of capital, innovators in Selma looking to fund their venture won't have far to go.

Selma is already one of America's most notable rural cities, being the site of the Civil War's Battle of Selma in the 19th century and the Civil Rights Movement's Bloody Sunday in the 20th century. Many rural places are reinventing themselves in the 21st century. If the people of Selma can collectively leverage its cultural heritage to spur equitable investment and economic growth, the city could be a leading example of how rural places can foster possibility and prosperity.

#### The Vision: Make momentum the focus

#### A brief overview of conditions

Downtown Selma has the bones of a thriving destination. For years, many deeply committed people have been putting in the work to make it so. Though many of its turn-of-thecentury French quarter-style buildings need serious repair, pockets of the city and individual places hum with activity. A 72-strand fiber network covers part of downtown with free wifi. Higher educational institutions, Wallace Community College and Selma University, are nearby. Several large regional employers including American Apparel, Vaughan Regional Medical Center, Bush Hog Mowing Equipment, and International Paper are located in or near the city.

A lot is happening beyond Broad Street in Selma. It has numerous nonprofits including the Black Belt Community Foundation, Foot Soldiers Park, and the Selma Center for Nonviolence Truth & Reconciliation. For activities, there is the Walton Theater, Slavery & Civil War Museum, the St. James Hotel, Arts Revive, and the Riverfront Park. Every year, thousands of people gather for the Jubilee to commemorate Bloody Sunday and the Selma-to-Montgomery March for voting rights.

#### Focus on momentum

For the City of Selma to reach its full potential as an economically prosperous, inclusive and innovative place, the focus must be on assisting existing projects before considering new ones. A lot of money over many years has gone into planning, but Selma is a small town, and there are only so many projects leaders and community members in Selma can meaningfully make headway on at once.

To this end, future aid efforts should focus on technical assistance that allows Selma's leaders and individuals interested in making changes to jump-start the next step of projects that are already underway. Additionally, out-of-town businesses and nonprofits looking to work with Selma should get to know multiple local stakeholders to understand needs early-on.

All work in Selma should be closely tied to visible action and building momentum for further action.



# Taking the next step together

This narrative can give you an idea of how the city of Selma could be experienced if the vision is achieved.

It's October 2029. Marcus, a 27-year-old aspiring entrepreneur, has returned to Selma, Alabama. He lives with his aunt in a modest house in the Riverview Historic District. A year after landing a remote job, he felt it was time to exchange Atlanta's urban tree-covered streets for the ones of his hometown. He enjoyed helping his aunt with her house restoration projects, and having a goodsized garage for his tech tinkerings was a nice perk, too.

Growing up in Selma, he'd always wanted to get involved in neighborhood projects, but he rarely left a discussion feeling like the ideas would go somewhere. That seemed to be a recurring theme locally: everyone had ideas for the Queen City but it was impossible to know which, if any, would pan out. Wanting to focus on action he could see play out, he enrolled in structural engineering in college. Yet watching his techy roommates create their wild ideas in real time had convinced him that computer engineering was a much more exciting fit, so he made the switch.

Selma seemed to go through a similar change while he'd been away, in which trying, iterating, and making things happen drew more

people to be involved. Each visit home was an adjustment to how he'd grown up interacting with the place. When he drove to his aunt's house, he found himself dodging potholes that were no longer there. A building Marcus and his friends used to sneak into as teens was the new home of his long-time barber. Sure, tourists were more prevalent, but so were places to eat, including a wing spot where his sister was the head chef. And besides, with all of the wayfinding signage around, fewer people stopped him to ask him where in Selma the Rosa Parks Museum was: a clever sign pointing out the far-off locations of non-Selma historic Civil Rights sites reminded them that many places across the region contributed to this story.

Though he mostly worked from home, Marcus liked to mix up his routine on Fridays to work from the coworking space near Broad. On his way there, he stopped at his favorite coffee shop to pour from a carafe at the "punchcard bar" that allowed him and other locals to bypass the line of tourists ordering lattés. Marcus crossed the street in a "foot soldiers" crosswalk and glanced at the bridge that drew so many people to his town. Now lit up each night like the Washington Monument, it felt more like an icon of remembrance amidst a thriving downtown than a flaking tourist magnet in a place left behind. It felt right.

Outside of the coworking space, a few other early birds chattered about business conundrums over steaming mugs. Marcus waved to

them and kept moving, past the locally-made goods on the first floor to his favorite desk upstairs, near the window. The hum of town's energy as it woke up helped him focus on his own tasks.

Around 4pm, work successfully concluded, Marcus packed his computer away and headed outside. He grabbed a sandwich from a local to-go spot on Water Avenue, past the balcony of his coworker's studio apartment, and headed down a long flight of stairs to a restored dock along the Alabama River. Jazzed by the changes he'd seen since returning, he'd been reconnecting with friends to hear about the projects they were involved in, to see where he might fit in.

He ate his sandwich and watched the sky dance on the water as he waited for his friend to stop by and share his idea for a multi-use field in Riverfront Park. "There's still a lot to work on in Selma" Marcus thought to himself, "but any of these ideas feels like a good bet." Selma had always been a place of possibility, but to Marcus at least, it finally felt like everyone was taking the next step towards those possibilities together.



# **Objectives**

In this section, you'll find four objectives that individuals, civic groups, and elected leaders can pursue in an effort to foster an inclusive innovation ecosystem in downtown Selma. The context for each objective is explained, an overview of the solution is provided, and page numbers for the placemaking actions that contribute to that solution are listed.

In the Placemaking section, you'll find highlighted objective symbols as a quick reference for what objective the action contributes to.

#### Individual inclusion is key to successful placemaking

Empowering individuals and small community groups to engage in placemaking activities is key to transforming the feel of a place. Even tiny, uncoordinated actions, such as playing music on a public bench, picking up trash, or using sidewalk chalk contribute to creating a vibrant environment. These voluntary, everyday actions send a powerful message that the space is cherished and lively,

making it a place worth being. Pages marked with a "community" symbol of two people high-fiving offer opportunities for individual or small group involvement, alongside any listed key partners.



"A key principle of placemaking is about creating exciting environments that foster human interaction and innovation. If we fabricate an artificial space with too many top-down, preconceived ideas then we aren't allowing for natural evolution and development."

-Oliver Mathers, design officer at Design West

1. Cultivate small actions that build local pride





2. Focus on community in the core

3. Attract tourists beyond the bridge





4. Foster regional cooperation



# Objective 1. Cultivate small actions that build local pride

#### The trash test

Trash is a common issue in many towns, and Selma is no exception. Their playgrounds, empty lots, and even flower planters are places where litter tends to show up. People are more likely to litter when they have "no sense of ownership for public spaces." They also do it for a very simple reason: they don't want to hold onto the object anymore, and they lack a trash can for disposing of it.

Building a sense of ownership over public spaces and adding more trash cans is worthwhile. Yet there will always be places,

#ARTSREVIVE

A barrier at the end of Church Street near the river, painted by a local arts group . ©CORI

like empty lots, where either option may be unrealistic. "It all comes down to norms, and you get those cues from the environment," says Robert Cialdini, a psychology professor at Arizona State University.

Small changes to the norms, through changes in the people and the places around us, can change nearly anything about how people treat a given space.

#### Little actions go a long way

The City of Selma and many other groups have done significant work in Selma. Yet building momentum for big changes in Selma isn't something that can (or should) be



A sign to discourage littering in Selma using a positive message . @CORI

the sole responsibility of elected officials, nonprofit organizations, and other appointed individuals. Humor writer P.J. O'Rourke penned, "Everybody wants to save the Earth; nobody wants to help Mom do the dishes." Grand, sweeping changes are valuable, yet Selma's future depends just as much on the care and small actions of the many.

If most people who call Selma home feel a sense of ownership over their downtown, and see that others do as well, downtown will become more lively. There are many actions that take anywhere from two seconds to twenty minutes that anyone can do anytime to improve their downtown.

# Placemaking Actions that support Objective 1:

<ul> <li>Picking up trash</li> </ul>	p. 22
<ul> <li>Downtown liveliness</li> </ul>	p. 24
<ul> <li>Wayfinding</li> </ul>	p. 26

River access

p. 34



# Objective 2. Focus on community in the core

#### The core experience

Selma's downtown, like most places, has been shaped by the types of commerce it facilitated over its long history. It has been a place to gather goods to be exported by way of river, rail, and road. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from 1884 notes a variety of factories, foundries, and warehouses producing anything from cigars to cotton to car wheels along Water Avenue and Broad Street.

The more modern development of Route 80 split Broad Street in two with a speed limit that says 25 and a design that broadcasts "highway". Zoning regulations limit downtown industrial activities, creating a cleaner local atmosphere but making tourists a larger percentage of downtown daytime occupants. With most downtown businesses closing by 5:30pm, zoning regulations have impacted locals' ability to support their neighbors' businesses.

Despite the 2009 Selma Master Plan aiming for a mixed-use and walkable downtown, achieving this vision faces challenges due to the dispersed nature of work, shopping, and living spaces.

Selma Innovation District Placemaking Plan

# Building back, centering on community

The future vitality of Selma relies heavily on tourism, but sustaining a welcoming environment for locals is equally vital. Integrating community-friendly features in downtown establishments, such as local-friendly menus or affordable events, fosters a sense of belonging and prevents downtown from feeling like a local-excluding tourist trap.

This inclusivity also necessitates a review of zoning ordinances that inadvertently stifle community vibrancy, such as restrictions on where light manufacturing can be or rules that keep small coffee shops from out of



Reflections Coffee Shoppe was designed with the local community in mind. ©CORI

neighborhoods. Efforts to rebuild and spark community engagement in downtown Selma require both time and a thorough examination of social and legal barriers. Encouraging interaction between residents and businesses not only revitalizes downtown but also strengthens the community fabric. By prioritizing inclusivity and addressing regulatory hurdles, Selma can create a downtown that thrives as a hub for locals and visitors alike.

# Placemaking Actions that support Objective 2:

<ul> <li>Picking up trash</li> </ul>	p. 22
<ul> <li>Downtown liveliness</li> </ul>	p. 24
Riverfront Park	p. 34
Shop co-design	p. 36
<ul> <li>Restaurant scene</li> </ul>	p. 38
<ul> <li>Innovation space</li> </ul>	p. 40
<ul> <li>Bowling alley</li> </ul>	p. 42
<ul> <li>Zoning for housing</li> </ul>	p. 43
<ul> <li>Zoning for business</li> </ul>	p. 45



# Objective 3. Attract tourists beyond the bridge

#### The tour bus experience of Selma

In a modern "song" of Selma, the lyrics would reflect how the city has become an inspirational site for civil rights tourists, but that after viewing the iconic bridge they depart for lunch and museums elsewhere, taking their extra travel dollars (and only part of the story) with them.

Tourists highlight that, when they go on some of these tours, they "feel as though [they] participated in the Selma to Montgomery March". There are an abundance of historic sites throughout the Black Belt, yet such a brief visit fails to do justice to the depth and breadth of Selma's historical significance. The question of 'Why Selma' can't be answered by the bridge alone, in a city with more than thirty historic sites, structures, and museums.

# History, recreation, and restaurants

Tourism in Alabama has increased greatly since the 2018 launch of the U.S. Civil Rights Trail. In the same year, the boarded up St. James Hotel was bought by a hotel brand, renovated, and reopened in 2021. In 2023, renovations began on the Selma-Times

Journal and in December, the city of Selma won a \$500K grant from the Delta Regional Authority for an "Innovative Tourism Hub".

Slowly, the effort of many people over many years has been building opportunities for tourism and local wealth creation beyond the bridge. Beginning with tours and daytime experiences such as recreation is smart because start-up costs are low, and every day trip visitor brings an average of \$325 into the local economy. However, long-term sustainable growth requires strategic investment in downtown infrastructure to attract overnight visitors and increase spending.

Prioritizing activities and amenities within



An empty downtown space that could be a restaurant. 

©CORI

sight of the bridge capitalizes on foot traffic and enhances the area's allure. This incremental approach fosters entrepreneurship and supports local businesses, ultimately enriching the community and local economy. By transforming Selma into a destination with diverse attractions and vibrant streetscapes, the city can harness its historical significance to generate greater economic prosperity for its residents.

# Placemaking Actions that support Objective 3:

Wayfinding	p. 26
<ul> <li>Active transportation</li> </ul>	p. 30
<ul> <li>River access</li> </ul>	p. 32
<ul> <li>Riverfront park</li> </ul>	p. 34
<ul> <li>Shop co-design</li> </ul>	p. 36
<ul> <li>Restaurant Scene</li> </ul>	p. 38
<ul> <li>Innovation space</li> </ul>	p. 40
<ul> <li>Zoning for business</li> </ul>	p. 45



# Objective 4. Foster regional cooperation

# A brief history of regional economic cooperation

Since its establishment as a town in 1820, Selma has faced competition from neighboring areas in Alabama for economic opportunities. Initially overshadowed by Cahaba, the state's first capital, Selma struggled to attract attention, particularly during an 1845 effort to relocate the state capital. Despite criticisms and setbacks, Selma managed to establish itself as a railroad hub in 1849, seizing an opportunity when Montgomery delegates missed a crucial meeting.



A mix of collaboration and competition allowed Selma to become a rail hub. ©Troy University Archive

<sup>Selma</sup> to

Throughout its history, regional competition and political maneuvering have influenced the distribution of institutions like colleges, hospitals, and military bases. Competition between places can often be healthy. However, whether the discussion is a town trying to win businesses or a football team trying to win their division, staying competitive becomes harder when one's pool of potential participants becomes smaller. In 1920, urban populations eclipsed rural ones, and for the past 100 years, smaller places like Selma have found it increasingly challenging to compete against larger ones for resources of all types.

# Regional collaboration to secure a brighter future

From a high of almost 30,000 individuals in 1960, Selma's population has dwindled to just under 17,000 in recent years. Yet such a population is comparable to towns like Millbrook and Prattville, both of which orbit Montgomery. These smaller cities have achieved recognition for their business-friendly environments, indicating that success is not solely determined by size.

Small places can succeed, but they have a better chance of doing so when they work together. For Selma and its surrounding areas, collaborating regionally offers a promising path to competitiveness. Similar to how Selma benefited from support from their Cahaban neighbors in 1849, advocating as a unified entity can amplify their voices and enhance their chances of success in the modern economic landscape. Whether it's securing funding for shared projects or recommending businesses to each other, regional collaboration presents opportunities to leverage their individual strengths for mutual growth and prosperity.

# Placemaking Actions that support Objective 4:

Wayfinding

p. 26

Active transportation

p. 30

River access

p. 32

# Placemaking: Actions, plans, and other suggestions

These projects (some of which have already been happening) each support one or more of the **objectives**, and are examples of how to make progress towards achieving them.

Some projects are simple and may not require special permission or planning, while others involve many **key partners** working together over a longer period of time.

#### **Project costs**

Approximate cost ranges for Placemaking Actions are outlined as follows and represent a general guide.

\$ = \$0 - \$5,000 \$\$ = \$5,000 - \$50,000 \$\$\$ = > \$50,000

#### **Time frames for delivery**

The Plan articulates placemaking actions suitable for delivery in the following time frames:

Up to 1 year Shortherm

1-3 years Mid-Term

3-5 years Long-Term

Some long term projects may continue on past five years to be fully realized.

#### **Pre-placemaking project checklist**

With public and public-facing projects, there's a greater chance for success if you go through the following list first:

- 1. Spend time in the place just observing what it's like there and who visits.
- 2. Who owns the space that the potential project will be on? For public places, what is the process like for using it?
- 3. Who else has a stake in this space, or who else uses it? Is it adjacent to local business owners, is it frequented by local youth, who decorates or cleans it?

#### **Acronyms for some Key Partners**

**AR:** Arts Revive

**BBTTC:** Best Buy Teen Tech Center

**BBCF:** Black Belt Community

Foundation

**BBBG:** Black Belt Benefit Group

P&D: Planning & Development Dept.

**P&R:** Parks and Recreation Department

**SDCCCTI:** Selma & Dallas County Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Info

**SRA:** Selma Redevelopment Authority

WCC: Wallace Community College

- 4. What plans have been made about this place in the past? Check with your city and county planning organizations, such as the Selma Planning and Development Department or the Tombigbee Regional Commission.
- 5. What changes do the owners, users, and other stakeholders want to see?
- 6. Who else that has done a similar project can vouch for the idea or provide advice?

#### **Golden Questions of Placemaking:**

When a project hits a snag, whether it be hesitant property owners or infrastructure disagreements, ask yourself the following:

- 1. Does this idea uplift the needs of those with the greatest connection to a space?
- 2. Is there a Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) way of testing the idea?



A creative example of local care. ©CORI

# **Key locations for placemaking actions**



#### The Core

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#### Downtown Business District

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#### **The City**

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# Placemaking actions at a glance

Name	Page	Cost	Timeframe	Partners	Objectives	Inclusive
Picking up trash	p. 22	\$\$\$	Short Term	DPW, P&R, Keep Selma Beautiful	<b>232</b>	KK
Downtown liveliness	p. 24	\$\$\$	Short Term	City Council, AR, local musicians and artists		XX
Wayfinding	p. 26	\$\$\$	Mid-Term	P&D, SRA, Regional Planning Partners		KK
Active transportation	p. 30	\$\$\$	rad-ram	P&D, DPW, ALDOT, Sweet Trails Alabama		KK
River access	p. 32	\$\$\$	Long-Term	AL River Trails, Resource Conservation Dev. Auth., P&D		
Riverfront Park	p. 34	\$\$\$	Mid-Term	P&R, P&D		KK
Shop co-design	p. 36	\$\$\$	Mid-term	Any new public-facing busi- nesses in downtown		KK
Restaurant scene	p. 38	\$\$\$	real-ferm	Current and future restaurant owners		
Innovation space	p. 40	\$\$\$	Mid-Term	WCC, The Chamber, Innova- tion-focused groups		
Bowling alley	p. 42	\$\$\$	Short Term	Any groups that put on festivals in Selma		XX
Zoning for housing	P. 43	\$\$\$	Short Term	FEMA, P&D, City Council		
Zoning for business	p. 45	\$\$\$	ShortTerm	P&D, City Council, Code Enforcement Office		KK

# Placemaking actions Picking up trash

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#### **Background**

Picking up a single piece of litter isn't going to change the world. The presence of litter itself is a very minor problem among the many experienced daily by residents of a rural city with fewer than its fair share of opportunities. Even so, it's a great place to start for people who care about the place they call home.

As mentioned in "Trash Test" on p. 15, the presence of trash can often be a sign of a lack of ownership over a space. When people feel connected to a place and see it as valuable to them— whether it be their home, school, park, or playground, they are more likely to pick up a piece of trash, or not litter it themselves. Dr. Charles Silberstein, a psychiatrist, adds that, "for some people there is often the reality of having been... mistreated as children and a later sense of anger and the feeling that the world owes me and so I am entitled to defile it."<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, though signs like "Don't Trash Selma" are popular, if they're placed in areas where litter is often present and aren't part of a clean-up effort, they can actually have the opposite effect. Studies have shown that people are more likely to litter places











**Key partners:** 

DPW, Parks & Recreation, Keep Selma Beautiful

that have signs that tell them not to, if there's already litter present. It gives the impression that this is an area where rules like that have little meaning. Some types of signage can be helpful, but only when paired with consistent clean-up efforts.

#### **Long-term impact**

Picking up trash and litter can be a powerful way to feel more connected to a place, to say "I care about what happens here." Showing care in public takes some amount of vulnerability (as well as time) but it can also make us feel better about ourselves because we've "done a good thing". It shows others that someone is paying attention to what happens there, which can reduce littering by others.

It also has an effect that goes beyond the humans who helped or who see the area on a regular basis. Pollution is dangerous for non-human animals, and a lack of pollution can make it easier for them to find food or safe shelter. Litter also impacts everyone's (visitors included) interest in spending time in a place, so cleaner parks are likely to translate into more visitors spending longer amounts of time in Selma. According to a study related to beaches, a lack of litter was rated as more



A planter being used as a trash receptacle. ©CORI



A pile of cans left under the bridge. ©CORI

Center on Rural Innovation

important than scenic beauty or convenient parking.

Furthermore, clean up initiatives work: Keep America Beautiful has been benchmarking litter rates in the US since 1969 and found that rates have dropped by 61 percent over a 50-year period.

#### LQC placemaking actions

Find a place you visit often—your favorite view in a local park, the place where you catch a ride to work, a corner between your house and a friend's house. Bring a small bag (and maybe gloves), pick up a few pieces of litter there, and drop it off the next time you see an available trash can. Over time, you may find that less litter occurs there.

There are many other ways to tackle litter in places you don't go by as often, but still care about. For spaces like that, you might:

- Organize an Earth Day or Fall Pick-Up event for Riverfront Park
- Restart a "Keep it Clean Selma" or "Keep Alabama Beautiful" clean-up campaign with individual neighborhoods in Selma to tackle their empty lots
- Raise money to add a trash can in downtown beyond Water Ave and Broad Street
- Add beauty (in the form of plants or art) to spaces that tend to attract refuse



Adding plants or art to places that attract refuse can help to deter future littering. ©CORI

## **Placemaking actions**

#### **Downtown liveliness**

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#### **Background**

Outside of the occasional festival, the sidewalks of downtown Selma are often very quiet. During the day, tourists who wandered away from the bridge to look at a mural or get cash from the ATM make up the bulk of users, but even they don't linger for long.

People often go where they see other people, where there's something to "do", or where both can be found. In a place where many buildings are in need of expensive repairs before becoming places with things to do again, it can be helpful to look at small, inexpensive ways of bringing life into downtown. One easy way to do this is by fostering space for busking.

Busking means entertaining people in a public place. It can include dancing, singing, drawing, writing, or many other art forms. For hundreds of years, buskers have entertained the public in hopes of earning money or other gifts from passersby. Busking gives newer local artists the opportunity to hone their craft, established artists the chance to earn a few dollars while passing through, and even professional artists a space to delight fans with an unexpected performance.







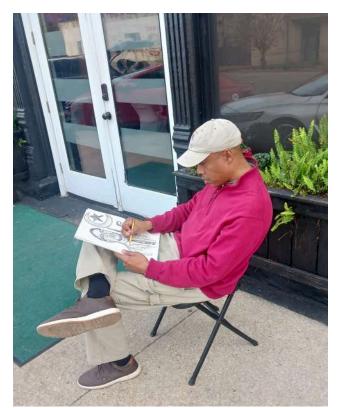




**Key partners:** 

City Council, Arts Revive, local musicians and artists

Though many people find that performances enhance their experience of public places, most cities have regulations that seem to prohibit performance. Officials may cite public safety or noise concerns as reasons to not legalize busking. Yet studies<sup>4</sup> have shown



A Selma artist practicing his craft in public ©Charlie Longmire

that public spaces with buskers are more "visitable and preferable" to people. If Selma artists and officials want to build a more vibrant place to call home, they might look to their neighbors in Montgomery for an idea.

Montgomery Busking Project

In 2022, a group called the Hilltop Howlers petitioned the City of Montgomery to create an ordinance that explicitly allowed busking. "If we want a vibrant downtown like Atlanta, or New York, or New Orleans, or places like that, a busking scene is part of that," said McGough, of the art and music nonprofit The Hilltop Howlers. "There's lots of protections. It's not near your schools, it's not near

The ordinance makes it legal and straightforward for buskers to register for a weekly or yearly permit (at \$7 and \$25 respectively) and then perform their talent for voluntary donations, be it strumming a guitar or typing poems on a typewriter, in permitted public spaces during certain times of the day.

Proactive engagement from the local creative community shaped a policy that supports and encourages artistic expression in public spaces. The policy is also a testament to

churches. It cuts off at night."

the city's commitment to fostering a vibrant cultural scene and providing opportunities for artists to showcase their talents while enhancing the downtown experience for residents and visitors.

#### Path to policy change in Selma

Allowing busking could foster a lively downtown atmosphere. If local artists and city officials work together, the change has the best chance of being effective for everyone involved. The following three steps should be considered:

- Write a draft busking ordinance to propose to the city council. Start with ones that have already been written, like Montgomery's, and adjust it to meet the specific needs of Selma. Share this with city officials for feedback, adjust it, and see if an elected official would consider proposing it. Attending council meetings to explain why such an ordinance is necessary can

A busker playing the violin. ©Hilltop Howlers

- help public-proposed changes to be taken more seriously.
- Write a draft of busking exceptions to existing ordinances and petition that they be changed as well. Several existing ordinances in Selma imply that activities like busking might be illegal. Thus, it could be helpful to add language along the lines of "This does not apply to permitted buskers or busking acting within the terms of the ordinance." to: a. Code Chapter 16, Article IX, Sec. 16-160. - Soliciting (10 (e) No individual, or any person on such individual's behalf, shall cry out, blow a horn, ring a bell or use any sound-amplifying device upon any street, alley, park or public place of the city or upon any private premises where sound of sufficient volume emitted or produced to be capable of being plainly heard upon the streets, avenues, alleys, parks or other public places, for
- the purpose of attracting attention to any goods, wares or merchandise which such individual proposes to sell.
- b. Code Chapter 17, Article I, Sec. 17-27.1. Same—Additional acts enumerated. (A) (3) Who accosts other persons in any public place or in any place open to the public for the purpose of begging or soliciting alms. c. Code Chapter 17, Article I, Sec. 17-78. Vagrants and tramps—Vagrants defined. (7) Any able-bodied person who is found begging.
- 3. Connect with local music, visual, written, and other arts organizations, to ask their members to consider purchasing a busking permit and performing once a month, to socialize this as an opportunity for artists and visitors in Selma.

Taking these steps would go a long way towards fostering a more vibrant downtown.



Selma has a large number of visitors and wide sidewalks, making it a natural place for busking. ©CORI

# **Placemaking actions**

#### Wayfinding

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Mid-Term

#### Background

People and organizations in Selma have been considering wayfinding signs for at least thirty years. As tourism continues to grow throughout Alabama, cities like Birmingham and Montgomery see the lion's share of tourism dollars. A locally-designed, thoughtful wayfinding system in Selma, along with an increase in restaurants and recreation opportunities, can help tourism to move beyond the bridge and foster economic opportunities that impact most of the population that has called Selma home for a long time.

#### LQC wayfinding workshop

In October of 2023, the City of Selma Planning Department, CORI and the Selma Redevelopment Authority put together a wayfinding workshop with 16 community members from across downtown Selma. Local business owners, teachers, and non-profit leaders came together to learn about wayfinding, review the wayfinding designs from the Design Selma Placemaking Plan, and to discuss what was important for them in future wayfinding designs.

The workshop ended with participants putting together and installing 13 temporary way-











**Key partners:** 

Planning and Development Department, SRA, Regional Partners

finding signs in key places around downtown, with the help of Steward Construction. "We talk all the time about doing things in Selma, and today we actually did something" said one participant. Other participants were so proud of having put something together for public benefit, they signed the back of the aluminum signs.

#### **Future wayfinding opportunities**

As a result of the workshop, CORI has continued to work with the SRA, the Conservation Fund, and others to identify future opportunities to move wayfinding past temporary additions and towards permanent instal-

#### What is Wayfinding?

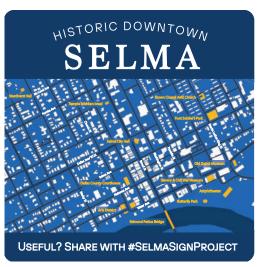
Wayfinding is an informational system of signs, colors, and other elements that helps people navigate through a place. As the system people use to orient themselves when traveling, wayfinding helps us interpret where we are and decide where we want to go. Even if we don't always realize it, wayfinding is everywhere around us. A thoughtfully designed wayfinding system can help visitors to better navigate a new place, and can help locals to feel more connected to the place they call home.





Examples of existing wayfinding signage. ©CORI







- Selma City Hall
- Tabernacle Baptist Church
- Slavery Museum
- **Edmund Pettus Bridge**

USEFUL? SHARE WITH #SELMASIGNPROJECT

To make the wayfinding signage for the initial workshop, CORI started with designs from the DesignPlace Alabama Placemaking Plan for Selma and solicited feedback on new iteration of it from the Planning and Development Department and the SRA. The designs were printed on vinyl and made into signs.

lations. Several grant opportunities have been applied for, and additional ones will be pursued to support the City of Selma. Throughout the process, it will be crucial to center the voices, ideas and needs of those most local to the places of news signs and other wayfinding designs.

To continue to move the project forward, the following approach should be considered:

- 1. Identify a graphic designer and urban designer who have experience working in the region, ideally locally, and can incorporate the needs of a wide variety of stakeholders in a cohesive way.
- 2. Continue to involve more community members by holding workshops that gain their insight and provide small, meaningful wins, such as temporary signage, painted crosswalks, or seasonal beautification of important places, like lights on the bridge around the holiday seasons.

Selma Innovation District Placemaking Plan



- 3. Bring representatives from various groups to the table for region-wide coordination to develop a regional wayfinding design and implementation plan.
- 4. Raise funds for community-vetted and designer-approved medium-term projects that fit into the plan and can be celebrated alongside other community events, such as thermoplastic crosswalks ahead of a march event, printed maps for Jubilee events that tease at future permanent kiosk maps, and signage that tells the stories of key places.
- 5. Apply for grants for large implementations, such as town-wide or route-length wayfinding systems.

A key part of this approach is to keep momentum and spirits high by interspersing visible "wins".











Photos from the October 2023 Wayfinding Workshop ©CORI

"We talk all the time about doing things in Selma, and today we actually did something"



## **Placemaking actions**

#### **Active transportation**

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Long-Term



Before the invention of cars, most streets in Selma and elsewhere were used for multiple modes of transportation, for markets, and for play. Trolleys, carriages, pedestrians, cyclists, and others shared the space and traveled at safe speeds. However, with the rise of automobiles in the early 20th century, urban planners and governments put a growing emphasis on accommodating many cars at higher speeds. This prioritization of automobile flow created unsafe conditions for other modes of transportation in the public right-of-way.

In 2023, Alabama ranked 10th highest out of all 50 states in the number of pedestrian fatalities. On Walkscore.com, the city of Selma scored 30 in walking and 41 in biking (each out of 100 possible points), meaning that it's a car-dependent place. For the 19% of households in Selma without a vehicle, as well as younger people and the elderly, this means that getting around is likely to be difficult. The majority of pedestrian deaths in Selma occur close to busy intersections that lack sidewalks, crosswalks, or pedestrian signals— often near places to buy food or go











**Key partners:** 

Planning and Development Department, DPW, ALDOT, Sweet Trails Alabama

to work.

#### Planning for active transportation

It's possible to design streets that make it easier to drive, cycle, and walk safely: these are called "complete streets". In the 2009 Selma Alabama Comprehensive Community Master Plan, it was noted that "A system of major "complete streets", including pedestrian, transit and local street connections" was crucial to plan for and implement.

In 2022, ALProHealth completed "Connecting Selma: An Active Transportation Action Plan", in which multiple short-term and long-term projects were identified that would improve the ability of all Selma residents and visitors to safely move around. It included changes such as curb-extensions, "road diets", painted crosswalks, signs, beacons, bike lanes, improved sidewalks, and shared use paths.

Within the Innovation District, the top priority suggested in the plan is the Franklin Street Reconfiguration (pg. 22 of Connecting Selma). This \$91K change would add much-needed shade and lanes for cyclists, returning the extra-wide road to a pedestrian-scale boulevard. Making these changes to

#### What is Active Transportation?

Active transportation is human-powered mobility, such as biking, walking, or rolling. Active transportation directly replaces motor vehicle miles traveled, so these modes are effective at conserving fuel, reducing vehicle emissions, bridging the first- and last-mile gap, and improving individual and public health. Bicycles, electric bikes, wheelchairs, scooters, and even walking are all considered active transportation. U.S. Department of Energy

a historic and significant road that isn't under ALDOT's ownership would demonstrate the City's commitment to active transportation, making it easier to seek consistency across downtown in future street improvements. Funding for this could in part be sourced through ALDOT's Transportation Alternatives Program.

From there, a crucial step toward implementation will be ensuring that they're cataloged in the long-term maintenance plan for individual streets. As funding is available, ALDOT and the DPW can add "spot improvements"

such as flashing beacons and high visibility crosswalks, as well as "linear improvements" such as bike lanes and a riverfront path that connects with downtown.

#### LQC placemaking actions

Most significant changes to public space, including streets, require a complex approval process.

However, many temporary, low cost actions may only need to be vetted or done in assistance with the City's Department of Public Works. Such projects can spur neighborhood conversations about street use and safety, and build momentum for costly long-term improvements. For example, one could test out the changes for the Franklin Street Reconfiguration or another medium-sized street improvement for less than \$1,000 by following the steps below. To test out existing plans for changes, begin at step 4.

- 1. Walk around the place you're interested in making changes to. Photograph points of concern, like pedestrian buttons that don't work, faded crosswalks, areas where people tend to speed, or intersections where drivers making a turn tend not to look for pedestrians.
- 2. Print out a map of the roadway and sketch potential changes you think would address the issues you're seeing. For "linear improvements", Streetmix.net is a helpful online tool that can make it easier to envision changes to your street. For help on using it, go to p. 54 in the Appendix. Additionally, you may find inspiration and helpful examples in a document put together by the Department of Transportation called "Implementing Pedestrian Improvements at the Local Level".
- 3. Share your drawings and photographs with others who know the street or intersection to get feedback on your ideas. Make changes

- as necessary, and see if they would be willing to advocate for these ideas with you.
- 4. Determine how those changes could be modeled using temporary materials. For example, plastic delineators could signify where road-narrowing bump-outs around crosswalks could be, chalk could be used to note new parking arrangements and bike lanes, and "Share the Road" poster boards taped to poles could draw attention to the changes. Make new drawings that show the locations of these.
- 5. Share these drawings and ideas with your City Council representative, with the Planning & Development Department, and/or with the Department of Public Works. Depending on size and scope, the project may require City Council approval and DPW supervision to implement, along with clear guidelines on how long the temporary changes can stay in place.
- 6. Install the temporary changes and document how drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and others act around them. Take note of if they're having the intended effect: do more people choose to walk or bike here; are drivers moving more safely?
- 7. Share your findings with your neighbors and local representatives.



A rendering of how Franklin Street could be adjusted to meet the needs of multiple types of users better. ©Connecting Selma Active Transportation Plan

## **Placemaking actions**

#### River access

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#### **Key partners:**

Alabama River Trails, Resource Conservation Development Authority, P&D

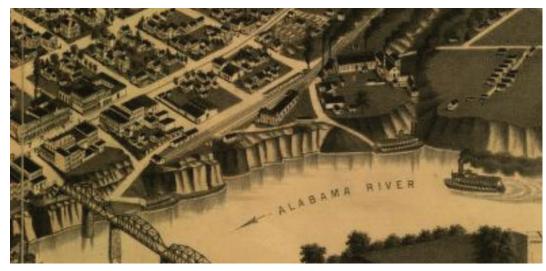
# Background

River access in downtown areas can foster community resiliency and economic prosperity. In large part, this is because water serves as a magnet: waterfronts are dynamic places to watch, gather, recreate, and learn. Many towns will design and install fountains, splash pads, or pools that fit the character of their neighborhood, but places alongside rivers, whose neighborhoods have been shaped by water over the course of history, have a natural advantage available to them.

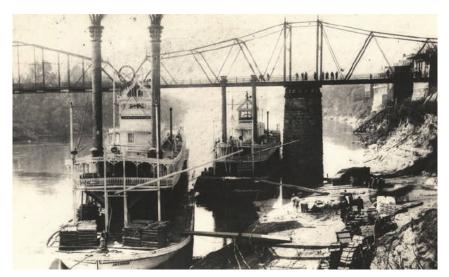
By integrating river access into downtown development, cities can cultivate distinctive identities, foster community pride, and promote economic growth, ultimately nurturing environments where people want to live, work, and play. Understandably, access to the riverfront is thus deeply important to many people who dream big for Selma. Yet dreams of river access in Selma, though once apparent, have had a hard time finding their footing today.

#### **History**

At the time of Selma's settlement by Europeans, there was no bridge by which to pass over the 40-foot white chalk cliffs. Thus, in order to access town at all, one had to do so by way of the river. Upstream from where the Edmund Pettus Bridge is now was a crossing area where rafts once ferried people, animals, and supplies from one side of the Alabama River to the other, and one needed to make a steep walk up a dirt path to get into downtown.

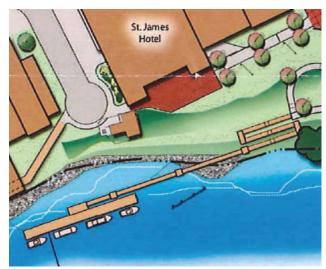


Selma once had two river access points downtown. ©1887 Perspective Map of Selma



A view of ferries unloading at the city wharf near the old swing bridge.

© Alabama Department of Archives and History



Example of a boat launch location. ©Selma Riverfront, Park Conceptual Masterplan

As the town grew, a second path emerged, and wharfs were built to facilitate the trade of goods that flowed into or out of Selma on boat. In a photograph from 1940, just beyond the newly constructed Edmund Pettus Bridge, a path to the riverbank is still identifiable. Its use likely diminished over the past 80 years as trains and later, trucks, took over the transport of most goods to and through town. Today, the paths that were once essential to Selma's economy are overgrown and invisible.

#### **Development and challenges**

Though the Selma City Marina is only a mile and a half downriver from the historic bridge, the nearest upriver launch point, Steeles Landing, is 17 miles upriver. For someone in a motorized boat, this distance isn't especially significant. However, 18.5 miles is near the Selma Innovation District Placemaking Plan

upper limit of what an experienced kayaker might paddle downstream in a day, making river kayaking trips nearly inaccessible for visitors or beginners relying on public access points.

While multiple public access points every few miles along a river would go a long way to foster a thriving water trail experience for locals and visitors, completing the long dreamed of "Riverwalk Development" in downtown Selma could be a crucial start. This design, in the works since at least 2018, includes a staircase, handicap accessible ramp, observation platform, and floating boat dock on the downstream side of Riverfront Park, behind the St. James Hotel.

However, much has held this long awaited addition up over the years. Multiple riverfront developments have seen delays and challenges related to the chalk cliffs they rest on, and work may need to be done by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to shore up the area.

Additionally, the Edmund Pettus Bridge was declared to be a National Historic Landmark in 2013, meaning that changes that occur within approximately two acres of the bridge need to be vetted through a Section 106 National Historic Preservation Act Review. Thus, the downtown riverwalk development has two levels of D.C.-level red tape to work through before it can move forward. With bids for the bridge to be a UNESCO World Heritage site, future changes could require even higher

levels of review before coming to fruition.

#### **Future considerations**

Projects like this require sustained attention to keep moving forward. Tourism and recreation, however, play a second fiddle to essential needs like housing. In a city still recovering from a tornado, moving this project forward would require an increase in local planning capacity. The National Parks Service's Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Community Assistance Program has been a resource in accessibility for communities across the country, and could provide professional planning, design and technical expertise to bolster capacity for river access in Selma, Advocates at the Alabama Scenic River Trail organization may be able to write letters of support or share insights from other recreation-promoting projects that they've been involved in. Connecting with these groups is a crucial next step for moving river access projects forward.

Additionally, if the proposed location of the riverwalk continues to face challenges, it may be worth exploring the original river access sites, further upstream near present day Green Street, to see if a rustic boat launch may be able to come to fruition with less red tape and a lower price tag. Wherever and whenever it happens, restoring river access in Selma will connect more people to the views that first captured the imagination of travelers, and contribute to its economic vitality once more.

# Placemaking actions Riverfront park

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Mid-Term

#### **Background**

Over the past few years, Riverfront park's amenities have been growing thanks to the consistent effort of many people. In 2017 a children's playground was built and in 2020 a splash pad was installed. Early in 2023, the Black Belt Community Foundation and the people of Selma advocated for a three-year "Levitt AMP Music Series"; the music began in earnest that summer. Much of the park remains underutilized, with trash left in corners and few people present outside of big events. Yet these significant changes are just the start, and a few more will help the space to flourish.

#### **Future considerations**

Riverfront park could bloom into a true hub for locals and tourists alike with just a few more changes. Building gateways with landscaping will make it clear to visitors that they've left the business district of downtown and are now entering a greener space with a relaxed pace. Adding some parking would help those with mobility challenges have better access to the area. Installing shade structures and planting trees would help the budding amphitheater scene to take off,











**Key partners:** 

Parks and Rec, Planning and Development Department



People at a concert, without shade, in Riverfront Park. ©CORI

as music lovers wouldn't have to wait until the sun goes down to get the most out of a summer show.

Looping in with the "Active Transportation Plan" the existing river walk should be im-

proved, and the fences that currently cut it off from public access should be removed or if needed, replaced with gates that are left unlocked during daylight hours. Ensuring that it connects to nearby neighborhoods

Selma Innovation District Placemaking Plan

and bikeways will help it see greater use.

Related to Selma's tourism hub grant, the space where the small red building in River-front Park once stood should be redone with tourists in mind: it should clearly broadcast its function from far away through signage and design, so that visitors unfamiliar with the area can be sure they've spotted the place to board a pedicab, and haven't instead made a wrong turn into the park.

#### LQC placemaking actions

These changes would need to be made in coordination with the City of Selma: specifically the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Planning and Development Department. Within that, community members can push for small, specific actions to be taken that move some bigger goals forward. Some of these could be:

- Making a formal request that the mayor and council reinstate Selma's "Tree Commission" to make recommendations on what species should be planted and where.
- Meeting with the Department of Recreation and advocating for the removal of a fence that's blocking the existing river trail in Riverfront Park from being fully used
- Initiating a regular Park Clean-Up Event (See p. 22 for details)
- Building and donating low-cost, temporary park games such as a cornhole set that could be brought out during events

Alternatively, if small groups of community members taking on individual actions isn't getting any traction through official channels, people in Selma who care about Riverfront Park should consider forming a Park Friends Group. The National Recreation and Park Association has a Park Advocate Handbook that explains in detail how to develop one.

Organizing demonstrates community buy-in

and commitment to making change happen, which can make it easier for busy city departments to prioritize their recommendations and see them as helpful allies.



Riverfront Park @CORI

# Placemaking actions Shop co-design

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#### **Background**

For places like Selma, planning for the needs of locals and the needs of visitors is essential for new and redesigned spaces. If a place feels unfriendly to visitors, it may lose out on seasonal windfalls of cash. If a place feels unfriendly to locals, it may not survive long winters or economic downturns that limit tourism. All places can be designed to meet at least some of each groups' needs.

#### **Reflections Coffee Shoppe**

Jackie Smith, owner of the Coffee Shoppe on Broad Street, had an opportunity in 2023 to open up a second location for her locally-acclaimed coffee shop in the former Selma-Times Journal building on Water Avenue. Locals make up much of her customer base, but she also caters to large groups of tourists in search of coffee and boxed lunches. With the new location being so close to the bridge, Jackie knew that the tourists would be easy to welcome in; she'd been doing it well for many years from a further away location. The comfort of her local base, however, could be harder to foster.

To inform her meetings with an interior









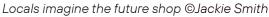


**Key partners:** 

Any new public-facing businesses in downtown



designer, Jackie partnered with CORI on a Community Coffeehouse Design Workshop that brought 6 community members into the construction zone of her future shop. They enjoyed coffee and snacks among 2x4's and insulation, and talked about what they love about her current place and what could make the new space special for locals. They also talked about how a flexible space with different sizes and heights of seating and tables would help it shift as needs changed,





The map of visitors in the original shop ©Jackie Smith

and that the brick wall that could lend itself to being a surface for art was a piece of art all in itself.

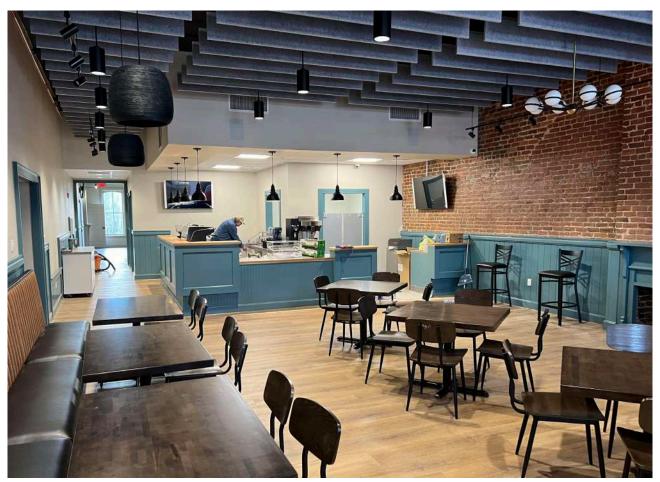
CORI then created a worksheet to capture the participants' ideas and consolidated the notes for the interior designer. The new space opened on March 22 and features some of the elements noted by local, dedicated customers.

#### LQC placemaking actions

This same approach can be applied to any space being redeveloped in downtown Selma. Using the sheet on p. 56 in the Appendix, a building or business owner can connect with potential customers and analyze their needs, understand their expectations for the space/service/shop in question, and develop a plan for how the space can meet some of

those needs and expectations within their existing goals for the business. Following this approach can ensure that businesses connect better with local potential customers, which can be especially important in a rural place where many needs either go unmet or require people to travel a significant distance.





The completed coffee shop, with an extra large map, flexible seating, and nods to the building's history. ©Jackie Smith

# **Placemaking actions**

#### Restaurant scene

\$\$\$

Long-Term



# **Background**

In downtown Selma, there are fewer than ten restaurants and cafes, and many of them have inconsistent hours, are closed for much of the year, or are only open for one meal a day. It's understandable that rural restaurants, that often have very limited staff, have days and times that it doesn't make financial sense for them to be open.

However, one of the most important factors for long-term success for restaurants is consistency. This doesn't mean that they need to be open for three meals a day, seven days a week to be successful, but it does mean that the times and days should be consistent throughout the course of a season. For locals dining out, if a place doesn't have a reliable reputation for being open, it might not be seen as an option at all. Most tourism is seasonal, so a restaurant is likely to have a hard time surviving the leaner months without a solid base of local patrons.

Restaurants that have a solid online presence are going to have an easier time attracting visitors than those without one. This can be as simple as having one's open hours on Google and Yelp, or could include social media or a











**Key partners:** 

Current and future restaurant owners

website that showcases the menu and hours of operation. This allows tourists with a busy schedule of historic site visits to plan ahead.

Addressing these challenges will help Selma's restaurant owners and workers see more consistent income.

#### **Future development**

The city of Selma and various individuals have been supporting the re-imagining and renovating of buildings throughout downtown over many years. In the past, most downtown buildings had shops such as restaurants below and apartments above. By revitalizing her "Mixed-Use" buildings, Selma can bring more people into downtown to live, which can be good for nearby restaurants, who will have a larger number of local potential patrons.

Similarly, cultivating a stronger local restaurant culture through filling existing culinary or meal time gaps will increase the amount of time that visitors and tourists stay downtown. The longer tourists stay in a place, the more they'll learn, the more they'll spend, and the more that money will impact a wider array of local people.

With more people living downtown in an in-



Interior of a Selma restaurant, ©CORI



A potential restaurant space. ©CORI

creasingly walkable place, having a grocery store will also be important. For most people in Selma, Walmart is the only everyday option for produce or other essential items. Co-op models could be worth exploring for a place with thriving local agriculture and a sensitivity to food prices. The Ever'man Co-operative grocery store and cafe illustrates how grocery stores can support local farmers and local families while providing good jobs to community members.

# LQC placemaking actions

In the short term, a number of relatively inexpensive initiatives could begin to fill the gaps noted above. Residents like A.C. Reeves are already making a difference through the "Five

- & Dime"'s chef-in-residence lunch program. Other ideas include:
- Train local restaurant owners to optimize their online presence with either a oneon-one visit during off-peak hours or a class during a shared day off
- Foster recurring weekend Food Truck gatherings that co-locate with existing music or art events
- Provide access to a rentable kitchen space, with work-exchange opportunities to decrease barriers to access
- Develop a basic Food Truck Accelerator in partnership with a local credit union



Concert-goers stopping at a food truck at Riverfront Park. ©CORI



## **Ever'man Co-Op's Story**

A small group of individuals wanted to combine their resources to provide the community with wholesome, nutritious food at a reasonable cost.

To realize this goal, the group started the Ever'man buying club in 1973, with the first official location in a log cabin. Three years later, Ever'man became legally incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation in the State of Florida. In 2013 they celebrated 40 years of serving the community by expanding and renovating their store on Garden Street, including the addition of a new community education center, more retail space, and expanded green space.

# **Placemaking actions**

# **Innovation space**

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## **Background**

Innovation spaces tailored to fostering business growth are indispensable for the vitality and relevance of rural towns in the 21st century. As urbanization and technological advancements continue to shape global economies, rural communities face unique challenges in remaining competitive. Offering resources and support for entrepreneurship at an innovation hub is key to empowering small businesses and startups to thrive amidst these changes.

These spaces provide not only physical infrastructure but also invaluable networks, mentorship, and educational opportunities essential for nurturing entrepreneurial talent and cultivating a culture of innovation. By equipping individuals with the tools and knowledge to start and scale their ventures, rural innovation spaces catalyze economic diversification, job creation, and community resilience.

# The up and coming innovation landscape

Selma is fortunate to have a large number of nonprofit organizations and a college that











**Key partners:** 

Wallace Community College, The Chamber, Innovation-focused groups

can support the entrepreneurial journey of their community members in various small, key ways. Several of these groups have been dreaming bigger and working towards building dedicated innovation spaces. Some of the most recent initiatives in various states of ideation and development include:

- a teen space focused on tech and prototyping
- a coworking space with fresh food and a focus on healthy living
- a business support space with Selma's GWC neighborhood in mind
- an entrepreneurship hub for Black entrepreneurs
- an innovation space and shop that focuses on the whole person
- · a food entrepreneurship facility
- a coworking space with workforce development resources

Like most rural places, there are many different needs in Selma, and having more than one small innovation space that each addresses unique local needs could be beneficial. However, most rural towns have only



Flexibility is key in new coworking spaces. ©CORI



Small nooks can be helpful for focused work. ©CORI

one space, or at most two, because the organizational capacity to manage such a space, and the market demand, is often limited. In places that do have more than one innovation space, "coopetition" becomes paramount to success, ensuring that groups are sharing relevant information, serving different needs, and in some cases coordinating on fundraising efforts. Alternatively, when the spirit of competition, for whatever reason, prevents similar groups from engaging in a basic level of coordination, people and opportunities can fall through the cracks.

## **Innovation space development**

For the innovation landscape in Selma to bloom, those looking to lead in this space

should host a meeting that invites other innovation-fostering stakeholders to the table. This could include representatives from Foot Soldiers Park, Invictus Development, the Knights and Orchids Society, Queen City Kale, the Selma Center for Nonviolence, Truth, and Reconciliation, and Wallace Community College. They should make it clear as to whom their primary audience is and what community needs they're looking to fill. In entrepreneurial fashion, it could be helpful to present this information on a business model canvas, so that opportunities for partnership and collaboration are outlined.

The initial outcome of such an effort should be a firm understanding of how all of the stakeholders are planning to uplift the innovation ecosystem of Selma in a coordinated way.

Beyond this initial meeting, these stakeholders in entrepreneurship should meet quarterly with a community advisory board to discuss approaches, programming, and potential barriers. This will be especially key for any leading organizations who don't have a long history in Selma. A reasonable amount of transparency in major decisions, demonstrated respect for local knowledge, and reinvestment in the community will help this organization to successfully address local needs and be seen as an integral part of Selma's regeneration.





Spaces for innovation should provide space for focused work as well as interactions with new people. ©CORI

# Placemaking actions

# **Bowling alley**

\$



#### **Background**

For many years, people in Selma have been calling for indoor activities for people to do. The most commonly cited example that has been echoed by many community members is a bowling alley. Bowling as an activity can attract a wide range of ages, is a great solo or group activity, and can draw in leagues, parties, locals, and visitors.

In a theoretical 16,000 sq ft building, about half of the floorspace would be dedicated to bowling lanes, and the other half would be used for other purposes including gathering space, eating area, a kitchen, ball and shoe area, and administrative space. Some bowling alleys diversify their income by adding a bar, laser tag area, or additional amenities.

If each bowling lane takes up approximately 1000 sq ft, then this theoretical building could have around 8 lanes. Each lane can cost upwards of \$45,000, so lane construction alone would cost at least \$360,000. With additional renovations to the space and the computerized scoring system, starting a bowling alley would likely cost around \$500,000 upfront. Although many people believe a bowling alley would be popular in











**Key partners:** 

Any groups that put on festivals in Selma

Selma, half a million dollars is a high bet to make on almost any idea.

## LQC placemaking actions

In the same way that food trucks can test local interest for a permanent restaurant, there are relatively inexpensive ways to test out if the interest in a bowling alley is as high as people believe it is. By bringing a portable bowling lane to street festivals, a potential proprietor or a community group could bring a new experience to town while demonstrating if such a large investment is worthwhile.

A regulation bowling lane is 42 inches wide by 60 feet long. A "Lighter Quicker Cheaper" version of a bowling lane doesn't need to be this exact size, but to create a similar experience, it should be at least 20 ft long. A business in Louisiana called Poker Productions LLC can rent a 28ft long portable bowling lane for around \$900 a day. The U.S. Bowling Corporation has a 33ft long "Rollerball Mini Bowling" trailer that can be bought or rented and towed to festival locations. There are also a variety of inflatable bowling lanes available for purchase online for around \$1,000.

In any case, testing out a bowling alley at one of Selma's many street festivals or at a special

event inside the George P. Evans Hall could build community excitement while validating a more sizable investment.

#### **Future considerations**

If strong community interest is found in bowling, but no proprietor is willing to make such an investment in Selma, an avenue to explore could be adding two bowling lanes to a new or existing community space. Community Facilities Grants from the USDA Rural Development office can be used to fund capital improvements to facilities with "community access". As in many rural places, many people are concerned that younger people lack affordable, accessible entertainment options. A community center that hosts a variety of indoor and outdoor hobbies could be a great partner for securing bowling access that attracts a wide range of users.



A blow-up bowling alley costs \$1K. @Rock It Inflatables

# **Placemaking actions Zoning for housing**

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## **Background**

Across the nation in the 1960's, many people who were able to afford to move into houses in the newly-constructed suburbs left city centers of all sizes. This hollowing-out of places created a stunted economy where less money circulated in those downtown neighborhoods. Those areas held large amounts of infrastructure amenities, such as transportation facilities and utility services, that are costly to maintain.

These population shifts were subsidized by commercial lending and government policy. With less private and public investment, higher-density amenity-rich business-residential districts fell into disrepair, with many losing the upper floor residences that had supported downtown neighborhood vitality to begin with.

Today, in some of these areas, incremental investment can offer significant long term potential to rebuild community wealth and opportunity

## **FEMA's suggestions**

Since the January 2023 tornado, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has been











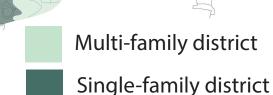
**Key partners:** 

FEMA, Planning & Development Department, City Council

working with the city of Selma to mitigate the natural disaster's damage across the Queen City. As part of this effort, they've put together a number of documents to suggest changes in governmental policy that would support building the city back in a more financially sustainable way. In their "Zoning code modifications to increase the housing supply" and "Housing redevelopment strategy" documents, they lay out a number of steps that can help the city of

Selma increase housing options. While these changes, if followed, will increase the housing supply across the city, focusing in on

the downtown and existing high-density areas can have the dual benefit of increasing housing supply while decreasing the long-term infrastructure costs that come with maintaining lower density, high-amenity neighborhoods.

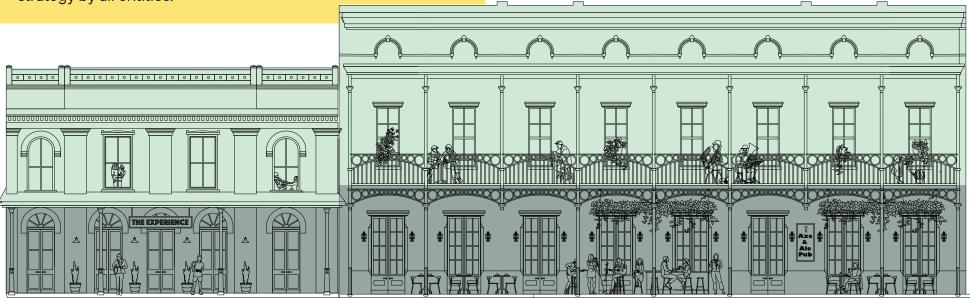


# Recommended steps in FEMA's Housing Redevelopment Strategy

- 1. Establish a Collaborative Housing Roundtable of inter-agency partners
- 2. Analyze Selma's housing needs.
- 3. Gather and assess Selma's existing housing strategies and documentation.
- 4. Define Selma's Housing Strategy policy objectives and goals.
- 5. Define Selma's Housing Strategy task and/actions to achieve/fulfill the objectives and goals
- 6. Develop a comprehensive approach to meeting these objectives utilizing all available tools via the collaborative table.
- 7. Identify potential funding sources and contingencies to implement the new strategy.
- 8. Develop a plan for implementing the recommended approaches.
- 9. Establish a list of goals and associated milestones.
- 10. Write the strategy and request consensus to adopt the new strategy by all entities.

# Recommended steps in FEMA's Zoning code modifications to increase the housing supply

- 1. Determine which neighborhoods are most appropriate for zoning changes.
- 2. Determine which areas are well suited to accommodate higher residential density.
- 3. Determine the appropriate density level.
- 4. Modify the zoning code to allow more housing options.
- 5. Allow multi-family dwellings as a use-by-right in all locations and neighborhoods.
- 6. Draft zoning ordinances modifications and a map amendment that implement the proposed code modifications.
- 7. Conduct public outreach to obtain consensus acceptance by the affected neighborhoods.
- 8. Obtain City Council and Planning Commission approvals.



Downtown buildings, through a mix of local and federal funding, could be renovated to again host businesses as well as residential units. ©CORI

# Other actions

# **Zoning for business**

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Zoning regulations are often very specific about what "types of uses" can occur within a given "zone or district." This is true in most places practicing zoning. Like many cities, some of Selma's zoning dates from a time when biased intentions were baked into these regulated zones.

The allocation of space for certain types of use was often oriented around economic and racial segregation, which had and continues to have an impact on community diversity, wealth distribution, and health outcomes today. Recognizing these truths can create opportunities to make policy changes. These changes can support increased quality of life and help to rebalance prior disinvestment.

#### **Ordinances worth review**

One zoning ordinance from 1954 that could be worth modifying for the 21st century is about "Home Occupations". They specifically prevent an "Office for any Professional" in any residential unit, regardless of size or zoning district. If this zoning ordinance is followed to the letter, taking a work call over "Zoom" at a desk in one's residence would techni-











**Key partners:** 

Planning & Development Department, City Council, Code Enforcement Office

cally be illegal, because the space would be functioning as a "professional office". Though it's unlikely that the city's zoning officer would write a citation for such, a city that is serious about attracting and retaining younger people and workers of all types would benefit from modifying this rule.

#### **Other**

As with the zoning rules involving housing, a thorough review of the current zoning rules related to where certain kinds of work are allowed would foster a Selma that can employ



Using one's home as an office is techincally illegal in Selma. ©Unsplash

more people..

To encourage changes to the zoning rules, one would want to write out what those changes could look like. One might start

# Section 23-11 Appendix A Zoning Section 5 Definitions: Home occupation:

A use conducted entirely within a dwelling and carried on solely by the inhabitant thereof, using no more than twenty-five per cent (25%) of total floor area, and which use is clearly incidental and secondary to the use of the dwelling purposes, and does not change the character thereof, and in which any signs advertising said home occupation are limited to one sign, not over two (2) square feet in area, and also in which there is no public display of goods. Examples of home occupation are: Dressmaking, the taking of boarders and the leasing and renting of rooms, tutoring, and teaching the fine arts. (Not to include beauty parlor, furniture upholstering, office for any professional).

by petitioning the City to adjust the "Home Occupation" definition to exclude the words "office for any professional".

To do this, interested people could do the following:

Write up a single-page document that shares the existing code language, what you recommend be removed, and why it should be removed (for example, because professional offices don't have the ventilation challenges that beauty parlors and furniture upholsterers might, or because such a rule may impact the City's ability to attract and retain young professionals who may not initially be able to afford both

- a place to live and a place to work.
- Present the document to the Selma Code Enforcement Office for consideration and review, to ensure that they see the value and would also advocate for such an adjustment.
- Make any necessary changes based on zoning office feedback. Share the document with your City Council Representative and see if they will champion the change with you.
- 4. Present the document to City Council for consideration, and urge them to adopt this change.



How renovations could look to the Martin Block of Alabama Ave. ©CORI

# **Now What?**

There are many ideas and potential paths forward outlined in this plan- too many for any one administration, planning organization, or highly motivated civic group with too many things on their plate to tackle.

You may feel somewhat overwhelmed, but hopefully you also feel informed about your own community in new ways, inspired about future possibilities, and excited to ask more questions to the experts of various spaces.

# **Big changes-**

#### for momentum builders

Quite of few of these projects have already been tested or are in the works. To have the best chance of making serious progress on big projects, it can be helpful to join projects that already have buy-in from civic groups and the City Council alike.

The following ideas have the greatest opportunity for making large changes fast:

• Wayfinding p. 26

Riverfront park p. 34

# Medium experimentsfor the inspired

If a given placemaking action has lit a fire under you, the best place to start is there. Talk to the "Key Partners" listed on that page about the idea, go back to p. 19 and walk through the "Placemaking Best Practices", to

ensure that the suggested course of action is still accurate.

Practicing placemaking can seem daunting at first, because, like a science experiment, there's always the chance that it won't go as expected. Thus, if you're able to overcome some initial hesitancy with a can-do attitude, the following experiments would tell you a lot about how to make a meaningful difference for a lot of people.

• Shop co-design p. 36

• Restaurant scene p. 38

Zoning for business p. 45

#### **Small wins-**

## for the already too busy

In a world where ribbon cuttings on million dollar projects are often the dream, it can be challenging to choose purposefully small actions. For those juggling full-time jobs and families though, that might be the best way to make a difference in your community right now.

Remember that even walking around town, picking up a piece of trash, or talking to someone new contributes to a higher quality place. The following actions could be a good place to find inspiration for quick, everyday actions:

• Picking up trash p. 22

Downtown liveliness p. 24



Foot Soldiers Park uses murals to share positive messages. ©CORI



Reflections Coffee Shop showcases local art in its newly restored space. ©Jackie Smith

# **Grants and other resources guide**

Name	Details	Website	Applicable Projects
AARP Community Challenge	This grant provides \$500-\$50,000 to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages, though some opportunities are age-specific.	aarp.org/livable-com- munities/communi- ty-challenge	Any from Objectives 1. (small actions), or 2 (com- munity)
Capital Magnet Fund	The CMF Program offers competitively awarded grants to CDFIs and nonprofit affordable housing organizations to finance affordable housing solutions and community revitalization efforts that benefit individuals and families with low-incomes and low-income communities nationwide.	cdfifund.gov/pro- grams-training/pro- grams/cmf	This is something that Community Development Financial Institutions can apply for build their capacity to assist with local projects.
CDFI Program	The CDFI Program uses monetary awards and training opportunities to invest in and build the capacity of CDFIs, empowering them to grow, achieve organizational sustainability, and drive community revitalization.	cdfifund.gov/pro- grams-training/pro- grams/cdfi-program	This is something that Community Development Financial Institutions can apply for build their capacity to assist with local projects.
Challenge America	Challenge America offers support primarily to small organizations for projects in all artistic disciplines that extend the reach of the arts to groups/communities with rich and dynamic artistic and cultural contributions to share that are underserved.	arts.gov/grants/chal- lenge-america	Any projects that involve Arts Revive, such as Down- town Liveliness (p. 24)
Community Change Grant	This funding is available to support community -driven projects that build capacity for communities to tackle environmental and climate justice challenges, strengthen their climate resilience, and advance clean energy.	epa.gov/infla- tion-reduction-act/ inflation-reduc- tion-act-communi- ty-change-grants-pro- gram	Parks- related projects, including Picking up trash (p. 22), River access (p. 32), and Riverfront Park (p. 36)

This program provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas.	rd.usda.gov/pro- grams-services/ community-fa- cilities/commu- nity-facilities-di- rect-loan-grant-pro- gram	Street improvements such as Active Transportation (p. 30) or community-food resource spaces in Restau- rant scene (p. 38)
This grant provides technical assistance and grant funding to improve walkability, safety, and affordable transportation access through context-sensitive strategies for improving community connectivity. A 20% local match is needed for communities that don't qualify as "underserved"	transportation.gov/ grants/rcnprogram/ about-neighbor- hood-access-and-eq- uity-grant-program	Active transportation (p. 30)
The program supports the development of a comprehensive safety action plan that identifies the most significant roadway safety concerns in a community and the implementation of projects and strategies to address roadway safety issues.	transportation.gov/ grants/SS4A	Active transportation (p. 30)
This NEA program provides expansive funding opportunities to strengthen the nation's arts and cultural ecosystem. Grants are available for arts projects in a wide variety of artistic disciplines.	arts.gov/grants/grants- for-arts-projects	Any projects that involve Arts Revive, such as Down- town Liveliness (p. 24)
This provides funding in partnership with local nonprofits for building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people.	hud.gov/program_of- fices/comm_planning/ home	For some of the later steps related to Zoning for housing (p. 43)
The National Association of Realtors grants up to \$7,500 for temporary projects that create new, outdoor public spaces in a community on unused or underused sites. A member of a REALTOR® association must be involved.	realtorparty.realtor/ community-outreach/ placemaking	Any project that has "LQC Placemaking Actions" as a sub-heading
	This grant provides technical assistance and grant funding to improve walkability, safety, and affordable transportation access through context-sensitive strategies for improving community connectivity. A 20% local match is needed for communities that don't qualify as "underserved"  The program supports the development of a comprehensive safety action plan that identifies the most significant roadway safety concerns in a community and the implementation of projects and strategies to address roadway safety issues.  This NEA program provides expansive funding opportunities to strengthen the nation's arts and cultural ecosystem. Grants are available for arts projects in a wide variety of artistic disciplines.  This provides funding in partnership with local nonprofits for building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people.  The National Association of Realtors grants up to \$7,500 for temporary projects that create new, outdoor public spaces in a community on unused or underused sites. A member of a REALTOR® associ-	op essential community facilities in rural areas.  grams-services/ community-fa- cilities/commu- nity-facilities-di- rect-loan-grant-pro- gram  This grant provides technical assistance and grant funding to improve walkability, safety, and afford- able transportation access through context-sensi- tive strategies for improving community connectiv- ity. A 20% local match is needed for communities that don't qualify as "underserved"  The program supports the development of a com- prehensive safety action plan that identifies the most significant roadway safety concerns in a community and the implementation of projects and strategies to address roadway safety issues.  This NEA program provides expansive funding opportunities to strengthen the nation's arts and cultural ecosystem. Grants are available for arts projects in a wide variety of artistic disciplines.  This provides funding in partnership with local nonprofits for building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people.  The National Association of Realtors grants up to \$7,500 for temporary projects that create new, out- door public spaces in a community on unused or underused sites. A member of a REALTOR® associ-

# **Grants and other resources guide**

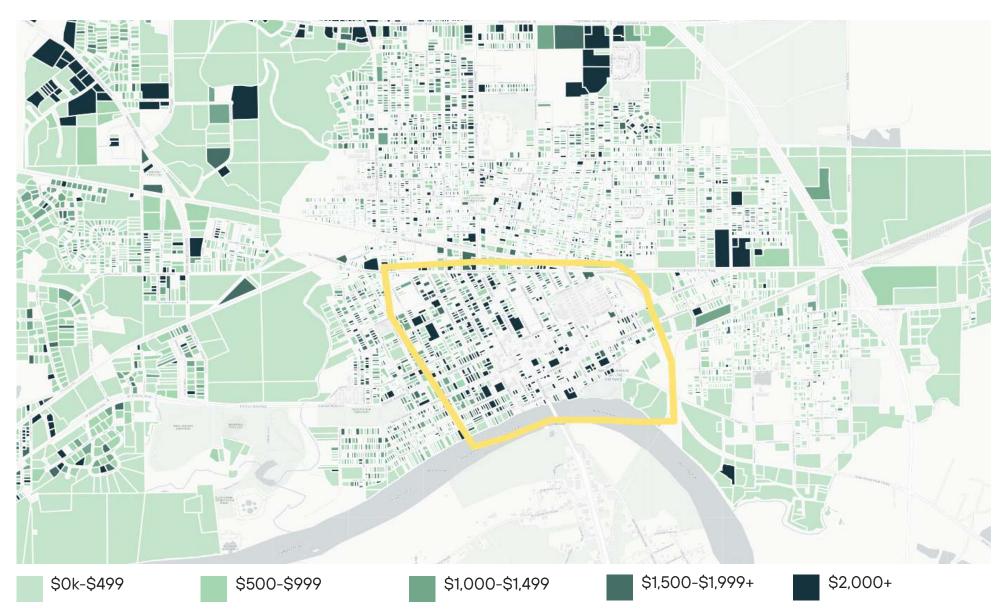
Name	Details	Website	<b>Applicable Projects</b>
Nation Endowment for the Arts: Our Town	The program supports activities that integrate arts, culture, and design into local efforts that strengthen communities over the long term. They require a partnership component, and grants range from \$25,000 to \$150,000; match needed.	arts.gov/grants/our- town	Most "Short Term" and "Medium Term" projects
Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Grant Program	The NAE grant awards connect communities by supporting neighborhood equity, safety, and affordable transportation access as well as mitigating negative environmental impacts.	transportation.gov/ grants/rcnprogram/ about-neighbor- hood-access-and-eq- uity-grant-program	Active transportation (p. 30)
New Market Tax Credit	The NMTC Program incentives community development and economic growth through the use of tax credits that attract private investment to distressed communities.	cdfifund.gov/pro- grams-training/pro- grams/new-markets- tax-credit	This is something that Community Development Financial Institutions can apply for build their capacity to assist with local projects.
Public Works Program	The EDA's Public Works program helps distressed communities revitalize, expand, and upgrade their physical infrastructure. This program enables communities to attract new industry; encourage business expansion; diversify local economies.	eda.gov/funding/pro- grams/public-works	Innovation space (p. 40); any brownfield sites in downtown
Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Program	This funds capital investments in surface transportation that will have a significant impact, especially in areas of persistent poverty or historically underserved communities. There's no minimum for planning, and \$1 million - \$25 million for construction.	transportation.gov/ RAISEgrants	Active transportation (p. 30)

Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant Program	This provides grants for projects to restore community connectivity by removing, retrofitting, or mitigating highways or other transportation facilities that create barriers to community connectivity, including to mobility, access, or economic development.	transportation.gov/ grants/renprogram/ about-rep	Active Transportation (p. 30)
Recreation Economy for Rural Communities	This planning assistance program helps communities identify strategies to grow their outdoor recreation economy and revitalize their main streets.	epa.gov/smartgrowth/ recreation-econo- my-rural-communities #Background	Any projects that involve parks or other outdoor areas.
Rural Business Development Grant	Project planning, feasibility studies, rural distance learning for job training, eco-devo, entrepreneurship training, incubators, revolving loan funds, rural transportation, business training and technical assistance and strategic planning.	rd.usda.gov/pro- grams-services/ business-programs/ rural-business-devel- opment-grants	Projects that involve job creation, such as Restau- rant scene (p. 38) and the Innovation Space (p. 40)
Rural Surface Transportation Grant Program	This program supports projects that improve and expand the surface transportation infrastructure in rural areas to increase connectivity, improve the safety and reliability of the movement of people and freight, and generate regional economic growth and improve quality of life.	grants/rural-sur- face-transporta-	Active transportation (p. 30)
Safe Streets and Roads for All implementation grant	The purpose of SS4A grant program is to improve roadway safety by significantly reducing or eliminating roadway fatalities and serious injuries.	transportation.gov/ru- ral/grant-toolkit/safe- streets-and-roads-all- ss4a-grant-program	Active transportation (p. 30)
State Economic Develop- ment Assistance Program	This Delta Regional Authority Program is used to fund basic public infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, business development with an emphasis on entrepreneurship, and workforce development.	dra.gov/programs/ critical-infrastructure/ sedap	Projects that involve job creation, such as Restau- rant scene (p. 38) and the Innovation Space (p. 40)

# **Grants and other resources guide**

Name	Details	Website	<b>Applicable Projects</b>
Thriving Communities Program	They funds organizations to provide technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support to disadvantaged and under-resourced communities, enabling them to advance transportation projects that support community-driven economic development, health, environment, mobility, and access goals.	transportation.gov/ grants/thriving-com- munities	Active transportation (p.
USDA Multi family housing programs	These assist rural property owners through loans, loan guarantees, and grants that enable owners to develop and rehabilitate properties for low-income, elderly, and disabled individuals and families as well as domestic farm laborers.	rd.usda.gov/pro- grams-services/ all-programs/ multi-family-hous- ing-programs	For some of the later steps related to Zoning for housing (p. 43)
USDA Single Family Housing Programs	These offer qualifying individuals and families the opportunity to purchase or build a new single family home with no money down, to repair their existing home, or to refinance their current mortgage under certain qualifying circumstances	rd.usda.gov/pro- grams-services/ single-family-hous- ing-programs	For some of the later steps related to Zoning for housing (p. 43)

# Taxable value per acre map of Selma



This taxable value per acre map shows that many parcels downtown are subject to a higher tax rate per acre, and that many of the parcels outside of downtown are subject to a lower tax rate per acre. ©CORI

# **Streetmix**

Streetmix.net is an easy way to imagine changes to a street you're familiar with, and see if the changes you're imagining would allow it to host the same number of users, or perhaps even more, with small changes. In this tool, you can add and subtract features to a street as well as change their widths.

If you've made a feature too narrow, it will turn red to tell you that it can't support the function or capacity properly. You can save, share, or login to keep track of your ideas as well.

# **Street engineering notes**

The following notes may be helpful to keep in mind when reimagining streets:

- Twelve-feet-wide lanes can support maximum speeds of up to 70mph
- Ten-feet-wide lanes can support maximum speeds of up to

45 mph

• Eight-feet-wide lanes are for "slow streets" and may not be appropriate for places that need to move a lot of cars quickly

#### How to use Streetmix.net

- 1. Measure the width of the street (including each lane) that you want to reimagine. If you don't have a tape measure and a helper, you can use Google Maps. When using Google Maps in satellite view, right click on one edge of the street to open a menu, and click "measure." Then left click on the opposite side of the street, and the distance between the two points will appear.
- 2. In Street Mix, change the default street width near the top of the page to the width of your street (including adjusting the units to be in Imperial).
- 3. Add, subtract, and adjust street elements by dragging and clicking.

Drive lane

1.500 people/hr

- 4. Name your street, save, or share your design.
- 5. If you're familiar with design programs, add local flair by adding buildings or other familiar elements. When you've come up with an idea, share it with you neighbors or other street users to get their thoughts on it first. Like all placemaking projects, street reimagining is a process. You might also look to other Lighter Quicker Cheaper projects for ideas on how you might propose testing

a change, to build trac-

tion and interest with

project partners.



An example of a downtown street made using Streetmix.

Planting strip

Sidewalk

15,000 pe..

Planting strip

Parking lane

Sidewalk

15,000 pe.

@Streetmix

Parking Lot



# Share your ideas for downtown! #WhatIfDowntownSelma

What places would you want to create in downtown Selma? What would make it more welcoming?

The Center on Rural Innovation is collaborating with TRHT Selma on an innovation-focused placemaking plan with people in downtown Selma. Placemaking is when people work together to design the places that are important to them, and innovation is when you create something that has never been seen before. No one is too little to dream big for the town they call home.

Share your ideas on social media as #whatifdowntownselma, drop off your ideas at the Selma Dallas County Public Library at 1103 Selma Ave, or email them to lisa.glover@ruralinnovation.us

# Shop co-design guide

Using the following questions, a building or business owner can connect with potential customers and analyze their needs, understand their expectations for the space/service/shop in question, and develop a plan for how the space can meet some of those needs and expectations within their existing goals for the business.

- 1. **Demographics:** Who do you think the target customers are for this place (Age, gender, income level, lifestyle, etc.) What are they interested in? What would they come here for?
- 2. **Space Experience:** What are your first impressions when you enter the space? How do you feel when you are in the space? (Comfortable, excited, overwhelmed, etc.) What kind of atmosphere do you expect from this type of space/service/shop?
- 3. **Functional Needs:** How do you see yourself spending time here? What are the essential services or products you expect to find here? How/where are you currently meeting that need?
- 4. **Motivations:** What problems or needs are you hoping this space/service/shop will address? What would make this space/service/shop your preferred choice over others?
- 5. **Pain Points:** What challenges or frustrations have you experienced with similar spaces/services/shops in the past? How can we address these pain points in our space/service/shop?
- 6. **Design and Layout:** What type of seating arrangements, lighting, color, and decor do you prefer? Are there any design elements that would make the space more inviting or functional for you? What might make it very clear that "this is somewhere special, somewhere different"?
- 7. **Services and Offerings:** What additional services or products would you like to see offered? Are there any events or activities you think would be beneficial?
- 8. **Communication and Engagement:** How would you like to be informed about new services, products, or events? (Email, social media, in-store announcements, etc.) What kind of community engagement or involvement would you appreciate?
- 9. **Mission and Vision:** How do you see this space/service/shop aligning with its stated mission and vision? Are there aspects of our mission and vision that particularly resonate with you?
- 10. **Local Bonus:** As a frequent customer or a local, what might be a small, meaningful token of our appreciation that you might want to see (low-cost drink, occasional freebie, secret menu item, etc)?

# Parking concerns for a thriving place

the number of visitors, residents, and workers in Selma, a question people often raise is: "Where will all these additional people park?"

While this is a common concern, it can be helpful to examine our beliefs about parking, its costs, and why the supply always seems too low. Rarely does demolishing a building to pave way for a surface lot, or spending millions of dollars on a parking garage fully address the issue. Additionally, such actions are often detrimental to the surrounding community.

Instead, we can use policies and design to proactively address parking needs at a significantly lower cost, and in ways that increase the vitality of our communities instead of pushing the places we want to be further apart from each other.

#### **Beliefs and costs**

In the United States, we tend to have extremely high expectations for parking: it is nearly seen as a right. When we arrive in a place in a car, we don't expect to be provided with free, convenient, and immediately accessible food or shelter-and the idea of asking to freely store 6 pallets-worth of stuff indefinitely (about equal to the size of a car) would be laughable. Yet we might leave if we can't find a free, convenient, and imme-Selma Innovation District Placemaking Plan

When envisioning changes that can boost diately accessible place to store our vehicle. In fact, we don't hold any other goods or services to this lofty standard.

> Since downtown land doesn't spontaneously transform into well-maintained, asphalt-covered areas, every parking spot incurs development and upkeep costs. Each surface lot parking space costs approximately \$1,000 to build, and an additional \$70 per year to maintain. The costs of privately owned spots are passed on to visitors of that private place, while the costs of publicly owned spots are passed on to taxpayers. So free parking isn't actually free; we all pay for it in some way. When parkings spots go underutilized, we are collectively wasting money and land.

#### The seemingly low supply

Many people trying to park in a given downtown remark that finding parking is challenging. However, a study of 27 mixed-use areas in the U.S. with self-proclaimed 'parking shortages' at peak times revealed an average oversupply of 45%. In any other situation, using barely half of something and proclaiming you're all out of it would seem ridiculous. According to Parking Reform Network's Jane Wilberding, when it comes to parking, abundance looks like scarcity for three key reasons:

we don't tell people where parking is:

"The twin gods of Smooth **Traffic and Ample Parking have** turned our downtowns into places that are easy to get to, but not worth arriving at." -Jeff Speck, Urban Designer

Public lots often aren't well marked, so easier-to-see street parking is the first to be used

- we don't share parking: Private businesses, residences, or organizations rarely pool their parking, so though one lot may be full at a given time (for example during sunday church service), people may not be allowed to park in the less-busy private lot next door
- We undervalue parking: Free parking spots are most likely to be taken up by the first-to-arrive commuters, who have every incentive to park in front of their destination all day, resulting in shortterm visitors having to park further away (or in some cases choosing to go somewhere else).

Adding more to the parking supply won't actually solve the issue of parking feeling limited in a downtown, because the issue isn't the number of parking spaces; it's the high expectations we have for parking and the way we use it that makes it appear scarce.

## Value(s) and potential misalignment

The way land is used in a place reflects its values. In downtown Selma, nearly 16% of the available land is dedicated to parking, totaling around 3,000 spaces. By comparison, buildings and shops occupy 21%, while parks and amenities cover 17%. This could be taken to mean that Selma values its parking nearly as much as its parks or its buildings.

Plenty of downtowns have covered 25% or more of their land with parking lots, creating vast dead zones where there were once shops, houses, or other places to be. Many cities have since been attempting to undo their mistakes as they see the effects that too much parking has on their depressed downtowns and potential property tax revenue.

On that note, we can do some math based on earlier findings and assumptions to give us a ballpark guess on what inefficient parking use is costing Selma in upkeep alone:

- Selma has around 3000 parking spots downtown
- 45% of parking spots may be sitting unused even during peak times
- Each spot takes around \$70 to maintain each year

This indicates that Selmians may be collectively spending nearly \$100,000 annually to maintain seldom-used parking. Imagine the outrage if the city maintained a sports com-

plex at that cost without it being used, yet proposed building a new swimming pool to attract visitors. "We should figure out why what we have isn't being used before we build something similar!". Yet we rarely apply that same logic to parking. Visions of future progress can easily be stalled by the question, "where will new residents and visitors park?"

#### Policy and design for parking

Despite all this information, it's challenging to break free from the ingrained belief that parking should be free, convenient, and immediately accessible. It's even harder to avoid reflexively asking 'but where will people park?' with every proposed construction or renovation downtown. But even people who do will be faced with crowds who still overvalue parking and don't believe there's enough in Selma. However, we don't need to add more parking to address their expectations: we just need to make better use of existing parking through policy and design. For example:

- If there were metered parking spots in front of businesses along Broad Street in Selma, many people planning to stay all day will choose a free spot on a side street one block away.
- If public parking lots are easier for visitors to spot with well-placed signage, they'll be more likely to park there instead of alongside a busy road.

 If parking lots are designed to be shared (and when parking minimums aren't imposed), nearby businesses can use more of their land for business purposes and less of their land for storing cars.

These changes don't increase the number of parking spaces, but they do change where people choose to park, which helps more of the existing parking spaces to be used regularly, and more of the most desirable spots to have higher turn-over.

## **Planning for vibrancy**

Prioritizing density, accessibility, and other needs over parking fosters stronger, more resilient economies and communities. At present in Selma, increasing downtown parking is more likely to hinder growth than accommodate it. Instead, focusing on parking policy and design would enable better utilization of existing spaces.

Places that focus on parking policy and design rarely have a real need to build more parking. In fact, the popular tourist destination, Seaside, Florida, has been able to remove parking to create a pedestrian plaza in their downtown—all because they've enacted policies that properly value parking and use it effectively.

A Selma that holds possibilities for everyone who calls it home will likely have the same amount of parking as it has now, and many of those possibilities, opportunities, and places worth going will be just a short stroll away.

# Selma parking vs leisure and amenities vs buildings and shops



Area estimates using OpenStreetMaps polygons. Source: OpenStreetMap contributors & map data © 2020 Google

# **Endnotes**

- Dallas County's employment rate showing slightly positive momentum over last year; city of Selma's unemployment rate the highest among large cities measured, Selma Times Journal, By Staff Reporters on 5-19-23 https://www.selmatimesjournal.com/2023/05/19/dallas-countys-employment-rate-showing-slightly-positive-momentum-over-last-year-city-of-selmas-unemployment-rate-the-highest-among-large-cities-measured/
- 2 https://south7585news.com/understanding-the-litter-problem-in-the-community-p1101-92.htm
- 3 Tell Me This: Why Would Anyone Litter? by Kate Feiffer, 10-26-21, Blue Dot Living https://marthasvineyard.bluedotliving.com/2021/10/26/tell-me-this-why-would-anyone-litter/
- 4 https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.647863/full

# **Documents References**

The following plans and policies informed the development of this Innovation District Placemaking Plan. This plan builds upon these plans and does not replace them.

- T-Mobile Hometown Grant Riverfront Park Project Plan
- Selma Alabama Comprehensive Community Master Plan, 2009
- · Reimagining Selma Alabama: A DesignPlace Report
- The City of Selma Historic Riverfront Park Masterplan
- National Parks Service's Develop Selma Interpretive Center
- · Master Plan for Selma to Montgomery Scenic Byway / All-American Road National Historic Trail
- Connecting Selma: An Active Transportation Action Plan
- Dallas County Area Study: An Analysis of Selma-Dallas County and the Alabama Black Belt
- Downtown Street Resurfacing Project Proposal
- Preservation and Reactivation Plan for Downtown Selma

