# 3 REDEVELOPMENT

As retail, employment, and the associated tax base have declined, many commercial properties have emptied. Both the historic main street of Fairfield, Gary Avenue, and the suburban shopping centers have lost tenants. Adaptive reuse is a crucial part of the redevelopment strategy for Fairfield.

To attract people downtown the way shopping centers like Western Hills Mall historically succeeded, downtown's individual businesses must act collectively to market downtown as a singular, unique destination with all of the activities and services offered at the larger centers. Events schedules, seasonal events, and social media can help bring people downtown, keeping it active and economically vibrant.

## GOAL 4 CONCENTRATE INFILL AND REDEVELOPMENT IN DOWN-TOWN AND THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS.

Because Fairfield is built out, redevelopment is critical to the revitalization of the city. The most economically sustainable option for redevelopment is in compact locations where it is easy to walk. This goal focuses on efforts to encourage investment along Gary Avenue, and within the Interurban Heights neighborhood.

### **ACTION 11**

#### Enable and incentivize mixed use development and compact development within a ten minute walk radius of Downtown and Miles College.

Mixed use developments generally consist of buildings that combine different uses within the same building. They usually provide for more public uses on the ground floor, such as retail shops, restaurants, or commercial businesses, and private uses on the upper floors, such as residential dwellings or office space. This historic form of mixed-use fosters lively, walkable neighborhoods.

Compact development helps create convenient neighborhood centers, with neighborhood commercial or mixed-use areas within a five-minute walking radius of homes. This type of proximity increases the potential for walking and bicycling and will put more homes close to commercial areas, parks, and schools.

### **ACTION 12**

Revitalize Gary Avenue through small-scale redevelopment and adaptive reuse.

Revitalization requires programming, partnership, and perseverance. Small incremental steps can begin with pop-up activities such as food trucks, retailers, and temporary uses in public spaces. However, in an environment with limited anchors, incentives must be provided. Simplifying and reducing the cost of permitting temporary uses will be necessary in the near term.

Special events such as festivals and markets can often begin the revitalization by attracting the community to the area. The Fairfield Main Street program should develop a programming committee to plan for events at City Park and along Gary Avenue. Events could include:

- Yearly events, like Taste of Fairfield;
- Seasonal and holiday events like fall festivals, Veterans Day parades, spring concerts; and
- Weekly events and event series such as an outdoor film series, weekly farmer's markets, weekly food truck pods, happy hours, concert series, and exercise series.

### **ACTION 13**

Repurpose empty buildings along Aaron Aronov Drive for warehousing, light industrial, maker space, call centers, or other large format employment.

The empty strip centers along Aaron Aronov are an opportunity to provide local employment options. As discussed in **9 Resources**, the majority of Fairfield's working residents are employed outside of the city, While adaptive reuse is most common in historic areas of cities, the empty structures along Aaron Aronov should be considered for uses besides large format retail.

Retail has been particularly affected by the shift to online providers. The vast amount of retail space along Aaron Aronov is unlikely to be utilized again. Approximately 80,000 stores and one quarter of existing malls are anticipated to close in the U.S. in the next five years. (Hartmans, 2021) This sets the stage to repurpose the empty retail centers as an employment center.

## GOAL 5 RESPECT TRADITIONS THAT GIVE FAIRFIELD ITS SENSE OF PLACE AND INSPIRE ITS CITIZENS' DEVOTION.

The unique era and history of Fairfield is evident in the city plan, buildings, and culture. The motto "A historic city moving in a new direction" is reflected in much of the community engagement. Celebrating the past with a forward look was a strong recommendation from many residents. This goal can be achieved by preserving and reusing the city's historic buildings and uses.

### **ACTION 14**

#### Position underutilized downtown buildings for reuse.

Catalog buildings available to purchase in

downtown Fairfield and provide the list to local realtors and Chamber of Commerce. Currently many buildings on Gary Avenue are empty or underutilized. Few are listed for sale. Fairfield Main Street Inc., Fairfield Business Alliance, the Fairfield Chamber of Commerce, and the Industrial Board could partner with the city to keep a catalog of these buildings, their square footage, and their physical condition. Consider adding the

Historic Preservation Committee, recently formed in 2021 in collaboration with the Black Heritage Council of the Alabama Historical Commission. Having information regarding available downtown buildings readily accessible along with a list of potential financing options will assist in filling structures with tenants.

An excellent example of filling spaces on Gary Avenue is the work of Restoration Academy and Urban Hope Community Church. The purchase and redevelopment or reuse of historic buildings has activated Gary Avenue between 48th Street and South Plaza. There are several building characteristics that should be supported during adaptive reuse, infill, and redevelopment, including:

- Simple forms that promote economy and flexibility
- Openings that enable natural cooling and ventilation
- Arrangements that enable efficient land use and incremental growth
- Elements that cultivate both public and private outdoor life
- Locations that enable discreet parking and storage on street or behind the building

### **ACTION 15**

#### Implement Gary Avenue facade improvements.

Develop a facade improvement program. Simple changes like a new paint job, repairs, and new signage can highlight each building's historic details and attract interest. Actions that are a part of the downtown facade improvement program should be exempt from permits and fees. Any effort to reduce the cost of the improvement should be supported. Neighborhood centers could also be considered for eligibility.

purchase in Steps to develop a downtown facade improvement program should be kept as simple as possible:

1. Create a partnership that will support the program. Likely partners include Fairfield Main Street Inc., the City of Fairfield, the Miles College Community Development Corporation, and the Chamber of Commerce.

2. Create the program goals and objectives. These should include:

- a. Building maintenance and improvement;
- b. Support local businesses:
- c. Improve property values; and
- d. Increase the city tax base.
- 3. Define project and applicant eligibility. This includes the area that is eligible, see **Figure 3.1**, the minimum requirements including completion timeframe, zoning compliance, funding sources, and a list of eligible and non-eligible activities.
- 4. Create the terms and conditions of the program and the program procedures.

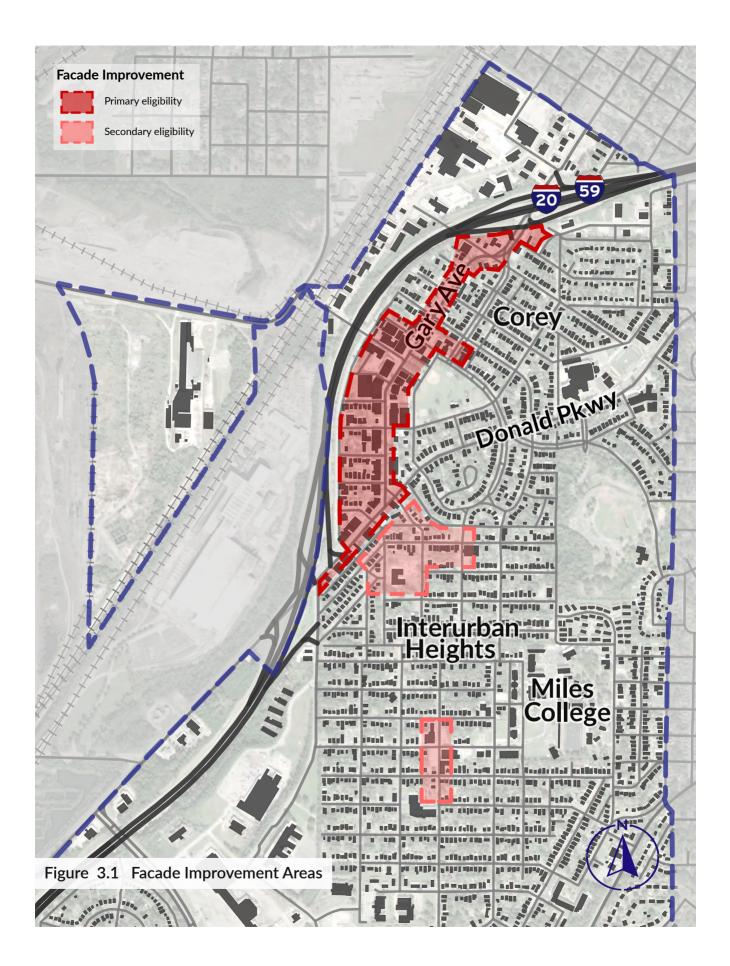
CHURCHES,

SCHOOLS, AND

**NON-PROFITS** 

**TO REVITILIZE** 

DOWNTOWN



# FACADE IMPROVEMENTS

## WHAT IS A FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM?

Facade improvement programs are incentive programs created to encourage property owners and businesses to improve the exterior appearance of their buildings and storefronts through financial incentives such as a matching grant or loan, a tax incentive, or through design assistance. They are often focused on commercial development in historic districts.

Facade improvement programs are usually developed and managed by an organization with a vested interest in civic improvement. Programs are usually staffed by a municipality's planning, community development, or economic development office, a Main Street organization, a business improvement district, or other government affiliated entities.

### HOW ARE THEY FUNDED?

Funding for facade improvement districts usually comes from a variety of sources including: annual tax levies, federal and state grants for community and economic development, housing, and downtown revitalization, as well as municipal reserves. To maintain the program, application fees and interest income generated by the facade improvement loans are used to help keep the funding available.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Foley, Cullman, Mobile, Albertville, Athens, Monroeville, Opelika, and Dothan have Facade Improvement Programs. Most are funded through the city through tax incentives and grants to business owners. Typically, in Alabama, the maximum awarded for a facade improvement project is \$5,000.



Image 3.1 Gary Avenue Facade Improvements (Auburn University Urban Studio, 2004)

## ELEMENTS OF A FACADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

- Statement of purpose that explains why the program was established
- A well-defined target area shown on a map
- Eligibility requirements for who can participate in the program
- A description of eligible projects usually includes anything related to improvement of the building exterior or projects visible from the street:
  - O Masonry repairs and pointing
  - O Facade painting, repair, reconstruction or replacement of historic features
  - O Awnings or canopies
  - O Signage
  - O Exterior lighting
  - O Window and door repair or replacement

- An emphasis on good design when federal or state funding is used, a design review and approval process usually includes:
  - O Design Review Board
  - O Compliance with local historic preservation ordinance or historic review commission
- When no review process exists, planning commissions usually rely on the Secretary of Interior's standards for rehabilitation, which apply if the target area or property is listed in the National and State Register of Historic Places
- Application and selection process.



# **POP-UP IDEAS**

## WHAT IS A POP-UP?

A pop-up is a temporary project that has the objective of neighborhood revitalization. Pop-ups allow citizens to join together to make small thoughtful changes to improve their community and create a sense of place. Pop-ups come in many shapes and sizes ranging from multi-day festivals and street closures, to small-scale art installations or temporary retail uses. Pop-up developments can be sponsored by the city or a private business, but are often citizen-led initiatives to help transform underutilized or vacant spaces that might be ignored by formal planning and development efforts.

Pop-ups can give a local gathering place a second life, transforming the area into a place to sit, shop, eat, or play. Essentially, no matter the scale or context, the aim is to make a place better than its current state. The idea is that these changes will "pop-up" before citizens' eyes on a temporary basis, then lead to long-term change. These initiatives can improve any combination of public health, transportation, general aesthetics, or economic development issues.

The following pages list possible pop-up ideas appropriate to Fairfield.



Image 3.2 Pop-up nursery



Image 3.3 Food truck

# 1 STOREFRONTS

Suppose a neighborhood is riddled with empty storefronts. Using the storefronts as temporary vendor shops or places to display art is a great way to give a street a facelift. Consider the following before planning a pop-up storefront:

- Contact the building owner or building manager for their permission.
- Inquire about plans for the space if possible.
- Advertise your need for vendors/artists using social media outlets.
- Ensure merchants have a business license. If they do not, then talk to the city to figure out how to collect these funds.
- A longer setup time frame could make it more worthwhile for vendors to participate.
- Consider a week or month long event for projects that deal specifically with economic development.



Image 3.4 Made BHAM Pop-up (Rev Birmingham)

# **BUSINESS FAIR**

2



Image 3.5 Craft fair

Just as malls and mainstreets have proven that the consolidation of options attracts more shoppers, pop-up business fairs do the same. This idea is not challenging to implement because it's a one day event. Businesses don't have to plan to staff a shop over weeks, and the event could be held on Gary Avenue sidewalks, or in Monument Park. The following process can be used to plan a business fair:

- Crowdsource potential vendors from Fairfield and the surrounding communities. Engage the faith-based community and school for contacts.
- Coordinate with the city to get permission to use Monument Park for a one-day event. The city should partner with the organizer to provide the space.
- Select a date that doesn't compete with other local or regional events.
- Choose a time of year when weather is likely to be conducive to an outdoor event.
- Advertise the event across social media outlets and in the local media.

# 3

4

# CROSSWALKS





Image 3.6 2nd & Grand, Los Angeles (G. Lennon)

Tactical urbanism uses the tool of crosswalk art to enhance neighborhoods and downtowns, support local artists, and increase pedestrian visibility and safety. Many cities across the U.S. have crosswalk guidelines for neighborhood installations. This activation could be particularly helpful on Gary Avenue at the intersections of Crawford Street, Valley Road, and 49th Street Ensley.

- Crosswalk should occur at an existing crosswalk and a location with a stop sign or traffic light.
- The primary purpose of this program is to create a public benefit. Therefore, images should not be advertisements.
- The crosswalk design should include the two white horizontal markings with standard design and reflectivity to mark the edges of the crosswalk.
- Consider using a limited palette of colors and simple graphic images to avoid visual clutter.
- The City Engineer must determine crosswalk appropriateness.

A pop-up park is similar to a pocket park in that the size does not need to be impressive but the scenery should be. This is an excellent solution for neighborhood stabilization and improvement while waiting for redevelopment.

Consider clearing out a vacant lot, several parking spots, or a parking lot with the help of a landowner and transform the space with:

- Local artwork
- Donated landscape
- Temporary games
- Seating
- Picnic tables
- Vendors



Image 3.7 Jersey City parklet (Street Plans)

# 5

# 6

# **FOOD TRUCKS**

The community strongly favors more restaurant options in Fairfield. To build momentum downtown and attract diners to the area, a Food Truck Tuesday, or other designated event should be considered. The city should partner with the Chamber of Commerce to expedite permitting and licensing in addition to the following:

- Choose a day of the week or month.
- Choose a location like Monument Park or City Park.
- Reduce the costs of and expedite permitting for interested trucks.
- Provide picnic tables adjacent to the truck parking area.
- Assure adequate queuing space away from travel lanes.
- Advertise the event(s) through social media and local churches and schools.



Image 3.8 Food truck event

# GREENING



Image 3.9 Norfolk resilient greening (Street Plans)

Connect with landscapers, florists, etc. to see if they would be willing to provide the project with greenery. Plants and flowers can transform a space. Consider contacting nurseries for donations of older plants.

The Portland, Oregon group Depave provides guidance on methods to turn unused parking lots into parks and gardens. Their motto is "free your soil" and their recommendations include:

- Get written approval for the project from the site owner.
- Research the history of the site to learn what might be in the soil.
- Test the soil for contamination.
- Create a vision for your future greenspace.
- Draw a site plan.

# BROWNFIELDS

### **INVENTORY AND MITIGATION**

The City of Fairfield received a Brownfield Inventory report in September of 2021. This inventory included the six sites shown in **Figure 3.2 Fairfield Brownfield Sites**. Two of these are located within the downtown redevelopment area along Gary Avenue.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) brownfields are "... real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant or contamination." Cleaning up and reinvesting in these properties protects public safety, improves the tax base, and potentially supports local job growth.

The Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) has a number of resources available to assist cities with brownfield mitigation. They are described in detail in the 2021 Brownfield Inventory report and include:

- Brownfield Redevelopment and Voluntary Cleanup Program.
- Alabama Land Recycling Revolving Loan Fund Program
- Brownfield Phase 1 and 2 Environmental Site Assessments
- Brownfield Visioning Workshop



Image 3.10 4604 Gary Ave



Image 3.11 4410-20 Gary Ave

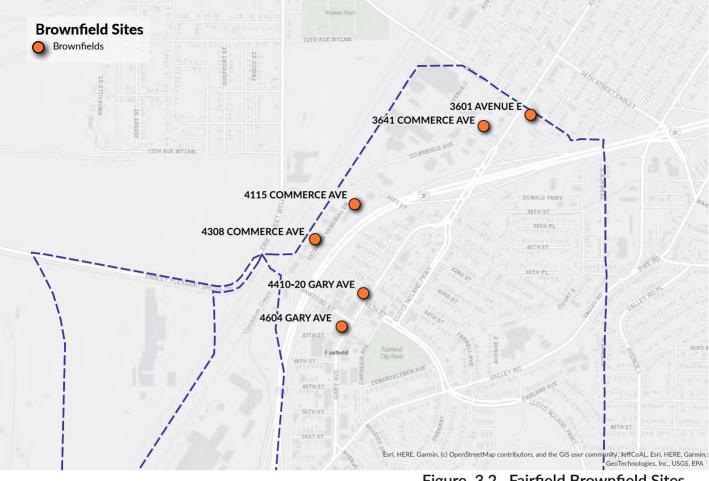


Figure 3.2 Fairfield Brownfield Sites



Image 3.12 3601 Avenue East



Image 3.13 3641 Commerce Ave/Veterns Memorial Dr

# CASE STUDY LOWE MILL

### **ADAPTIVE REUSE**

Lowe Mill Arts and Entertainment in Huntsville is a prime example of creative, flexible adaptive reuse of an obsolete facility. Lowe Mill opened in 1901 as Huntsville's fifth textile mill. Over the years, it has served many industrial uses, including cotton warehousing, shoe production – including soldiers' boots during the Vietnam War – and general warehousing. It was purchased for redevelopment in 2001 and is now the south's largest privately-owned arts facility.

This historic factory complex was designed to enable buyers to engage with artists and observe them at work. It combines studios with dining, a market hall, movies on the lawn, and event and educational spaces. Lowe Mill is an example of adaptive reuse, but it goes further by modifying a single large space to accommodate multiple small-scale businesses.

Today, Lowe Mill is home to 150 working studios for over 200 artists, makers and independent businesses, 7 art galleries, a multi-use theatre, 4 performance venues, restaurants, a foundry, a chocolate shop, and a community garden. Individually these businesses would not have been able to occupy such a large space, but with creative and flexible design, collectively they are able to return life to an obsolete mill. Visitors benefit from a unique shopping experience and each vendor enjoys additional foot traffic encouraged by other businesses under the same roof. Additionally, Lowe Mill has reenergized a declining neighborhood around it, catalyzing new infill housing and renovations of historic homes.

Sources: Lowe Mill, (Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment | History, n.d.), Downtown Huntsville, (Lowe Mill District – Downtown Huntsville, n.d.), and Huntsville/Madison County Convention & Visitors Bureau, (Lowe Mill A&E, n.d.)



Image 3.14 Lowe Mill concert (Lowe Mill)

# **MOTIVATORS**

Pop-up activity and programming are important techniques to revitalize downtowns. Initial steps include organization and activation, followed by acquisition, stabilization, and targeted recruitment in future phases. These early actions should coincide with rebranding for downtown Fairfield, strengthening its position to attract future anchors. Mid-term recruitment should focus on the blocks between N. Plaza and 49th St. Ensley. These blocks have existing momentum because of the activity at Restoration Academy, City Hall, and Urban Hope Community Church. Two initial pop-up activations focus on food and local business incubation. Urban Hope is planning for redevelopment including a grocery and coffee shop, so a weekly food truck pod and a periodic business market can begin to create a destination for the incubation of new, small companies. Initial stages of redevelopment should also focus on the gateways to downtown. The most prominent gateway will be the intersection of Gary Avenue, Donald Parkway, and Avenue C. The northern gateway to downtown at Gary Avenue, Lloyd Noland Parkway, and I-20/59 should follow at a later date.

## MOTIVATOR 3 SHORT-TERM ACTIVATE DOWNTOWN THROUGH GATEWAY IMPROVEMENTS AND TEMPORARY USES.

Gary Avenue

Valley Road / Donald Parkway

Agth Street L

Figure 3.3 Downtown Activation Sites

nsley

Palmer Avenue

Stre

Gary Avenue

Pop-up Locations Pop-up Locations Parks

### ACTIVATIONS

45th Street Ensley

There are a number of underutilized parking lots downtown that could be activated with temporary uses. These uses must be coordinated with the owners of the property for a single event like the business market, or a weekly event, like the food truck pod. When these uses begin to attract residents, Miles students, and the larger community to visit downtown, they may incentivize future capital investments and help to plug some of the retail leakage that goes elsewhere in the region. The two proposed sites for short term interventions are on either end of downtown to increase energy between the two sites. When downtown begins to be managed with some methods similar to a mall (e.g. anchors on either end, coordinated hours, collective marketing, see more in Economy), economic gardening results.

# **GATEWAY AND MARKET**



**GATEWAY**. The first motivator is a gateway in the right-of-way triangle at the intersection of Gary Avenue, Donald Parkway, and Avenue C. This property is owned by the city and with beautification, can create a sense of arrival downtown. The illustration shows a replication of the historic bench at Memorial Park. With this duplicated at the southern entry to downtown, it highlights the importance of the history of Fairfield while enhancing the appearance of downtown, indicating a priority to people on foot, and creating a sense of arrival and a place to rest.

**BUSINESS MARKET**. As mentioned in **Pop-up Ideas Business Fair on page 33**, markets or fairs are economic development drivers, business incubators, and activators for downtowns. Since they are occasional events, they require a less significant commitment for organizers, and if they are

successful, they can become

regular events over time.

Image 3.15 Downtown gateway illustration



Image 3.16 Pop-up market illustration



Image 3.17 Southern gateway and market diagram

This location on the north corner of Avenue C and Valley Road suggests a partnership with the American Legion at 5021 Gary Avenue. American Legion Post 347 is temporarily closed, and the parking lot is under -utilized. This site's visibility is an ideal location for a pop-up market or fair.

In addition, the city should explore the possibility of working with the American Legion to beautify the southern wall of their building. This could include a welcome to Fairfield sign, and possibly a mural to celebrate the history of Fairfield.



Many residents expressed appreciation for Magic City Grill downtown as well as the need for more dining options. One successful downtown activator is to organize a food truck pod on a weekly basis to develop a market for food and beverage retailers. These illustrations consider the underutilized parking lot on the NE corner of Gary Ave. and N. Plaza at Memorial City Park. The shade and seating at the park and location near city hall, the library, and Urban Hope Community Church provide a good location to test a food truck pod. Coordination with the land owner would be required, and the city should take the lead on that effort. The city should reduce fees and permitting for food trucks, and work with the Chamber of Commerce and Fairfield Main Street, Inc. to encourage regionally successful operators to come to Fairfield one day a week to begin with. In addition to finding the best options for Fairfield, an advertising campaign will need to be developed to assure residents support the trucks from the beginning. The city can use its social media outlets and collaborate with community networks like the Fairfield City Schools, and the Fairfield Ministerial Alliance to make sure residents are aware of the events. The city should use Birmingham and Bessemer ordinances as guidelines.

### "TO BUILD A PRODUCTIVE PLACE, PEOPLE MUST BE ABLE TO START WITH NOTHING AND, THROUGH THEIR EFFORTS, END UP WITH SOMETHING."

- Charles Marohn Strong Towns: A Bottom-Up Revolution to Rebuild American Prosperity

### FOOD TRUCK POD



Image 3.18 Food truck pod



Image 3.19 Food truck dining



## MOTIVATOR 4 MID-TERM ENCOURAGE DOWNTOWN IN-CREMENTAL REDEVELOPMENT

The empty storefronts on Gary Avenue provide options for redevelopment, with studies informed by the Fairfield community engagement process, including a combination of adaptive reuse and new construction. Most of the existing buildings can be reused, although there are a few with only the brick facades intact. **Figure 3.4** indicates the status and potential of existing buildings.

Much of this chapter focuses on pop-up solutions since they require little capital and may be expedited through a simplified permitting process. This solution can apply to buildings as well as empty parcels. The city should partner with the Chamber of Commerce, Fairfield Main Street, Inc. and non-profits like Urban Hope and Restoration Academy to sponsor business incubation in some of the empty storefronts that do not need extensive repairs to electrical, plumbing, and building structure.

Historic brick facades reflect the richness of Fairfield's history and should be treated as assets. Some roofs and floors of old buildings are no longer viable, but the facades can be restored and new interior structures built. As is obvious from Figure 3.4 many downtown buildings (shown in white) just need simple updates and facade improvements to be usable, while others (shown in yellow) will need more work done to be safe and attractive to users. Very few of the buildings (shown in gray) will need to be removed.

The process for adaptive reuse can be complex, so it should be incentivized by assuring the public is aware of buildings and spaces available, establishing partnerships with the realtor community and building owners, and acquiring buildings that are unsafe, see **Action 14 on page 28**.



# INCREMENTAL DEVELOPMENT



Image 3.20 Incremental Development Alliance training (IncDev)

Neighbors can transform their cities. Instead of developers from out of town extracting value from Fairfield, local community members can learn how to invest in their own community to create value that stays in town. When places are built and maintained by people who love them, the outcomes are better.

To incubate and accelerate community members as developers, starting at a small scale is essential. Simple buildings in a concentrated area are best for new developers, including backyard cottages, duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, live-work buildings, and adaptive reuse of Gary Avenue buildings.

Emerging small-scale developers should focus on buildings that earn their keep. Creative strategies are needed to make sure a building's income is more than its expenses to keep a positive cash flow, and may require outside support from foundations and federal grants for larger endeavors, and tapping into home equity for smaller initiatives. Developer, John Anderson, shares a wealth of knowledge with rookie developers on his blog, including essential finance tips and proformas. (Anderson, 2015) The Incremental Development Alliance is the leading source to help new developers get up to speed. Examples of success stories are on their On the Ground page. (Incremental Development Alliance, 2022) Some of these stories include links to sample plans and elevations, including Missing Middle Housing Types for Chattanooga. (Incremental Development Alliance, 2016) IncDev Alliance Virtual Bootcamps share with new potential developers strategies, plans and elevations, design guidance, sample proformas, financial planning training, and funding sources. (IncDev Alliance, 2022)

Small buildings similar to many of the motivators envisioned in this plan are having a positive impact on local economic development and municipal finance across the U.S. A good case study is South Bend, Indiana, where "The City and a growing group of small-scale developers ... have worked to remove roadblocks to development to enable the residents of South Bend to rebuild their neighborhoods. Our small-scale developers are leading this charge and their spirit and hustle must be encouraged to inspire others to take a small step to heal their street, block and neighborhood." – Tim Corcoran, Planning Director (Heller & Reilly, 2021)

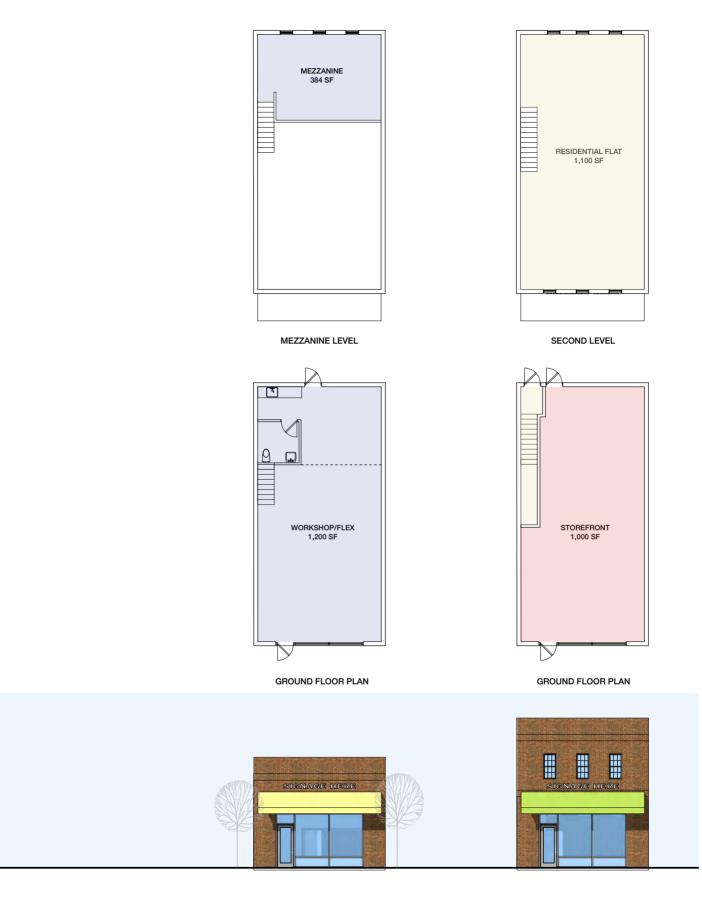
#### SMALL BUILDINGS

Small buildings have some of the greatest returns over time due to smaller capital investments. The buildings here are a sample of small commercial and mixed use buildings that can work on the empty parcels downtown. The live/work options are a good model for a sole proprietor who can use their residential mortgage to subsidize their business space. Adjustments will need to be made to the zoning ordinance to permit this scale of residential use downtown. See Action 34 on page 98.



### LIVE/WORK BUILDINGS

### FLEX BUILDING W/ MEZZANINE



### FLEX BUILDING W/ MEZZANINE

### LIVE/WORK FLAT

Image 3.21 Incremental development building types

As downtown begins to experience revitalization, infill development becomes a future phase. Small development projects are the most likely to occur first, and frequently have the largest economic impact. Projects at this smaller scale are illustrated in **Image 3.21**, using types of buildings that are easily located on smaller parcels shown on **Figure 3.5**.

Valley Road / Donald Parkway

Gary Avenue

49th Stree

