

STRONG DOWNTOWNS

Walkable, active Downtowns are vibrant locations for co-locating retail businesses and services

OVERVIEW

Strong Downtowns is about making an impact in communities all across SWLA by focusing on the streets and spaces that inspire people to walk and gather. This human scaled infrastructure helps support small businesses, community togetherness, and the idea of a Downtown hub that is unique to the scale and needs of each community in SWLA. The goal is to take the principles of walkable streets and fun, engaging festival parks and have them available as a best practices guide that is refined as each strong Downtown project is implemented. This also means streets that are not only walkable and engaging, but also use principles of good stormwater management; green infrastructure that can help support the area in case of flooding. While it starts with streets and parks,

HIGH
priority



2-5
years



Varies
by street





WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CALCASIEU PARISH?

While Lake Charles serves as a regional Downtown between Houston and Baton Rouge, many of the smaller communities also have Downtowns that could attract economic and cultural investments. Strengthening these Downtowns by making them more walkable and adding places for people to gather and celebrate local food and culture will attract new businesses.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CAMERON PARISH?

Strong Downtowns serve as central gathering spaces, where people and services can co-locate to create community cultural centers. By locating amenities and entertainment into central locations, strong Downtowns can serve residents throughout Cameron Parish in locations that are easily accessible and unique to each community.

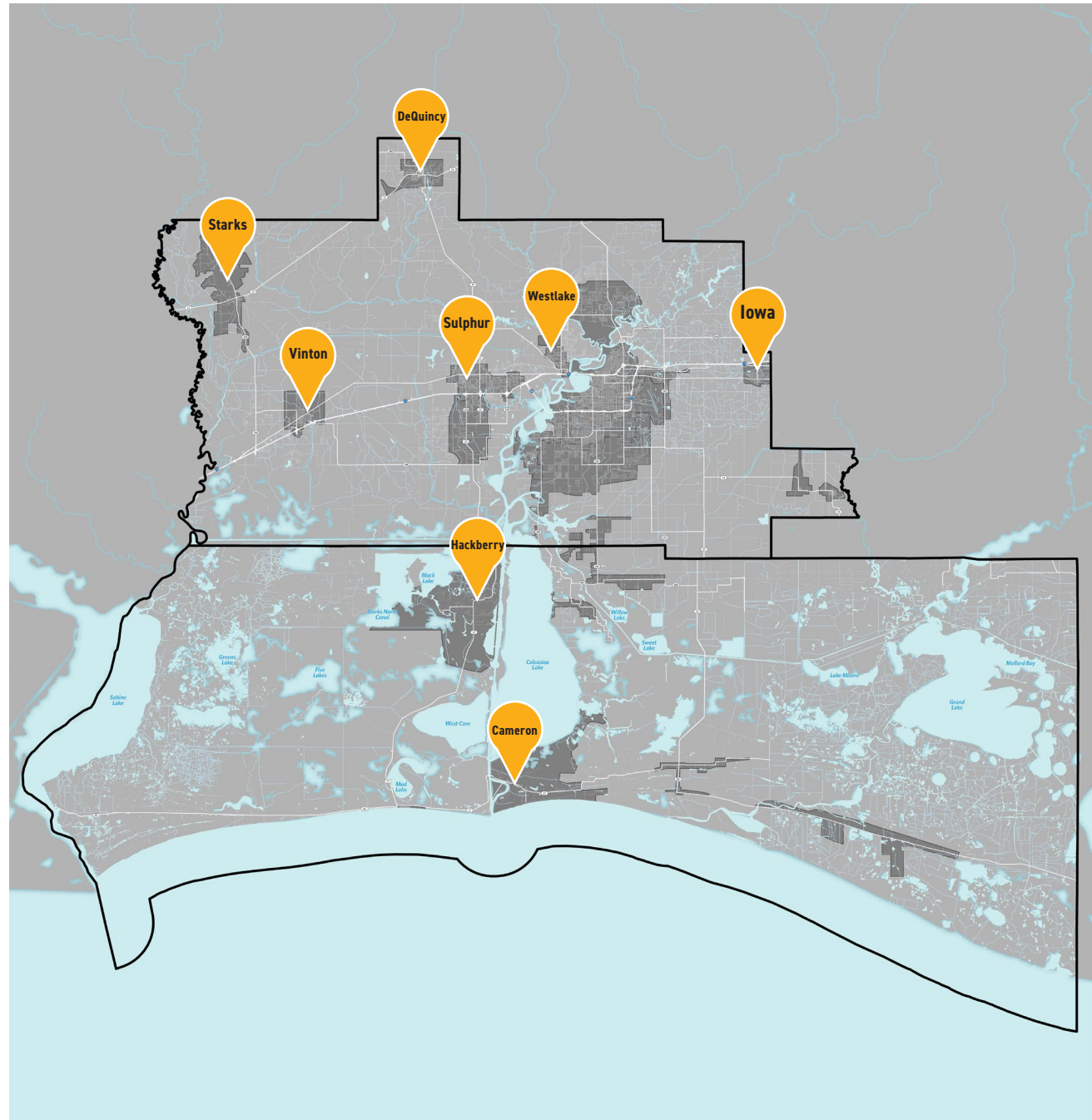


the goal is for these investments to spark infill development for housing, businesses, and services, which will continue to support the strengthening Downtowns.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Downtowns nurture new and existing small businesses, jobs, and services and offer people-centered places for cultural gatherings and festivals.
- Streetscapes and welcoming public space are a key ingredient to successful Downtowns.
- Stormwater management is a critical issue for the region, and improved streetscapes can more successfully assist in capturing and storing water.

Vibrant Downtowns are needed as the heart of the community. It needs to be a place where the community can come together to work and play.



PLAN TOPIC AREAS

Plan Topics

Strong Downtowns focuses on growth in Community Planning, Economic Development, Infrastructure, and Natural and Cultural Resources. Strong Downtown would:

Community Planning

- **Promotes walkability and bikeability by providing enhanced pedestrian infrastructure on main streets in each community.** This is not a one-size fits all approach, but allows the principles of walkable streets to be tailored to the available rights-of-way, budgets, and ultimate goals of each community. Some might be more focused on having more greenery, trees, and stormwater infrastructure, while others might have more right-of-way and would like to implement more outdoor dining opportunities. Regardless of secondary goals, a primary goal for each strong Downtown should be walkability on safe Downtown streets.

Economic Development

- **Supports growth of the creative industries and small businesses by investing in the public realm to attract private investment and the customers to support businesses.** The increased walkability improves visibility for the small businesses in existing buildings and hopefully in new development infill buildings as well. The principles of strong Downtowns focuses on creatives and small businesses, rather than large single employers.

Infrastructure

- **Improves drainage and stormwater infrastructure.** New street infrastructure would focus on stormwater management, adding bioswales, catchment basins, and other methods for stormwater management. These best practices can be used in different ways depending on the needs of each strong Downtown project in each community.

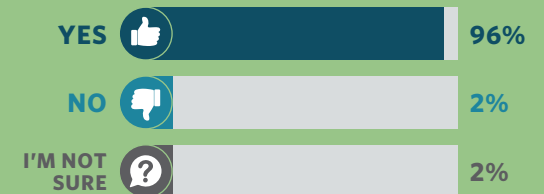
Natural and Cultural Resources

- **Celebrates the vibrancy of communities across both parishes by exploring what makes each unique and building on that in each Downtown.** Each of the Downtowns in SWLA is unique, with its own history, traditions, and buildings. Walkable streets and beautiful gathering spaces help celebrate what is distinctive to each community. The spaces chosen for emphasis should celebrate that, especially historic buildings, special natural views or amenities, or other things that are special to each place.
- **Offers spaces for cultural festivals, gatherings, and celebrations.** Festival parks, no matter their size, should be scaled and programmed accordingly, considering the variety of festivals and events unique to each community in SWLA.

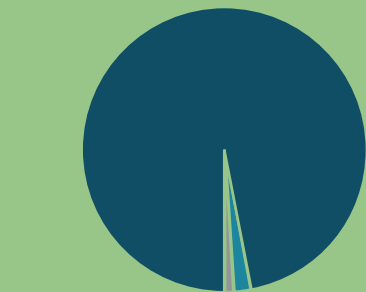
This will make the places we go every day beautiful and stimulating.

HIGHLIGHTING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

I would visit Downtowns that implemented designs to enhance streetscapes and public spaces.



I think this project will benefit SWLA.



COMPLETE STREETS

The framework for a strong Downtown starts with the streetscape. The street has the ability to accomplish many functions, from providing places for restaurants and vendors to spill out, to helping retain stormwater in tree wells, to providing safer places for people to bike, to allowing easy parking and access to small businesses. Each strong Downtown in SWLA will have different streets with different widths of the right-of-way, which will impact what elements of a complete street can safely be implemented. Some streets may be wide enough for parking on both sides and new bike lanes, while others might do better with parking on one side and new tree wells. To help make stronger streets, Strong Downtowns should focus on:

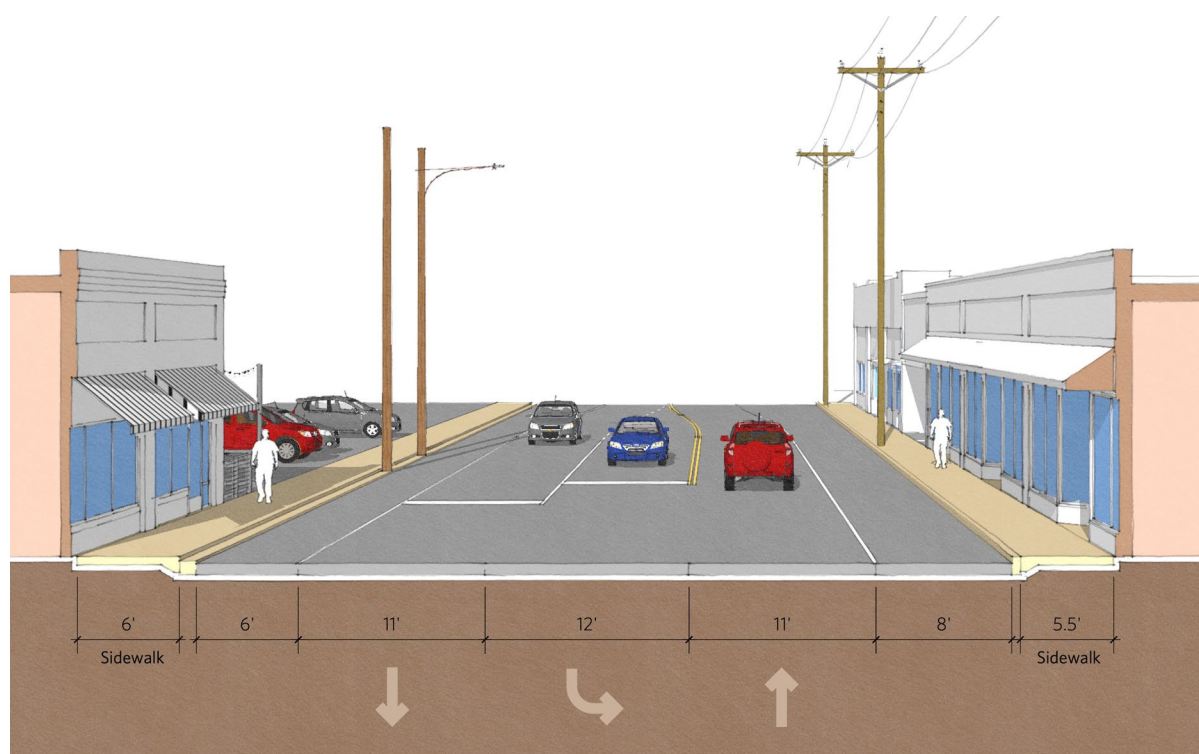
- **Narrowing the lanes:** changing the width of travel lanes from 12 or 13 feet to 10 to 11 feet can drastically change how quickly people move through Downtowns, making it safer for pedestrians to walk.
- **Add green infrastructure:** adding plantings, trees, and green infrastructure in tree wells can help manage stormwater and reduce flooding in streets
- **Create layers to protect the pedestrian:** additional trees and on-street parking can create layers that protect a pedestrian walking or a sidewalk cafe or vendor.



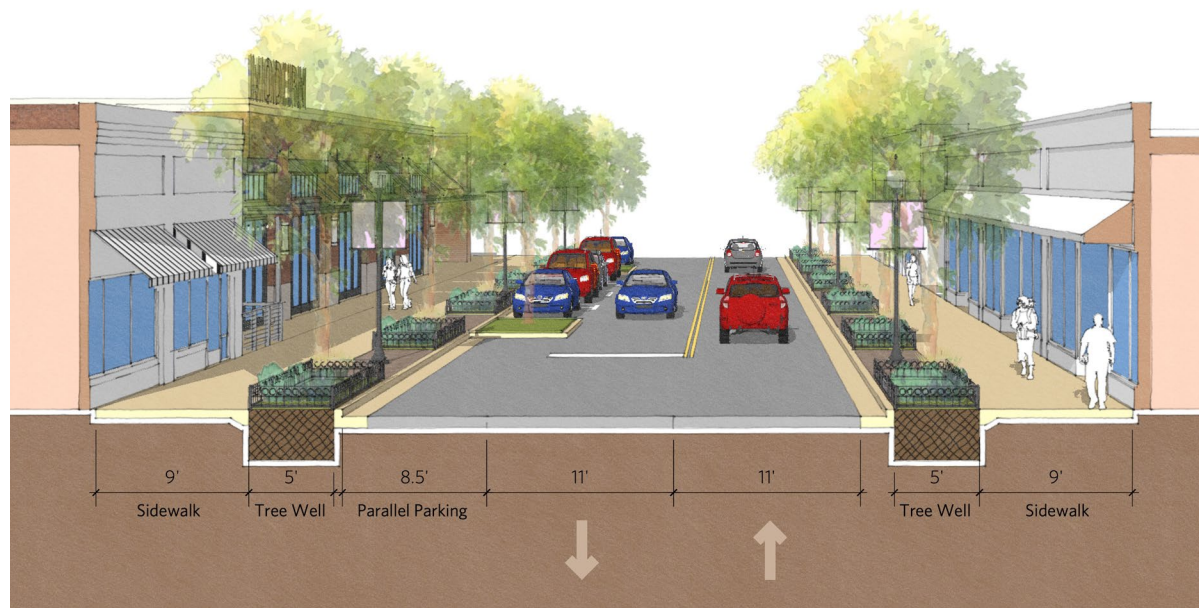
Before: Downtown Sulphur



After: A vision for a stronger Downtown Sulphur



Before: S. Huntington Street in Downtown Sulphur



After: S. Huntington Street transformed in Downtown Sulphur

A Good Example

DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE, SC

- The transformation of Greenville's Downtown began in the 1970's when four lanes of traffic were redesigned with green medians, angled parking, and wide sidewalks
- In 2010, Greenville completed their Downtown Streetscape Master Plan to incorporate Complete Street elements
- Consistently listed as one of the "Best Downtowns" and travel destinations
- The most successful tool used for construction costs has been utilizing Tax Increment Financing (TIF), which allowed the City to utilize property tax revenue increases within a defined district for redevelopment and revitalization efforts



Barriers and trees to protect patrons



Signage, curb bump-outs, and diagonal parking are elements of complete streets

A Good Example

BAILEY PARK: WINSTON-SALEM

- 1.6 acre small urban park built on the site of a former parking lot adjacent to a power plant
- The park is designed for multiple uses:
 - A stage for concerts and movies in the evenings
 - An open lawn for yoga and other recreational activities
 - Areas of hardscape for food trucks during lunch and dinner
 - Instances of public art
 - Lush planted areas



The stage and public restrooms create a comfortable setting



A 30-foot grade change over the park is handled with terraces

FESTIVAL PARKS

Festival parks can go by many names, but festival parks for strong Downtowns are intended to be community gathering spaces that are as unique and engaging as each of the communities that they inhabit. These spaces can be large with many different programming elements and spaces, or small and intimate for just a few people at a time. Each community should examine what sorts of gatherings they would like their festival parks to hold, be it local festivals, high school proms, farmers markets, food truck round-ups, or a host of other types of events. Each community should also consider what the park is like when it isn't actively programmed; is it a place where people want to relax and gather, play and bring dogs, or have lunch on a pleasant weekday afternoon. Understanding the needs of the community helps create a festival park that fits in while meeting those needs.

I appreciate the vision of creating a more active and vibrant Downtown for residents and visitors alike to enjoy.



Entry signage and site specific elements can help highlight a unique place



The Grove at Heritage Square is a great local example of a festival park in a community that has hosted many events



A
Entry Signage



B
Farmer's Market



C
Plaza with Movable Chairs

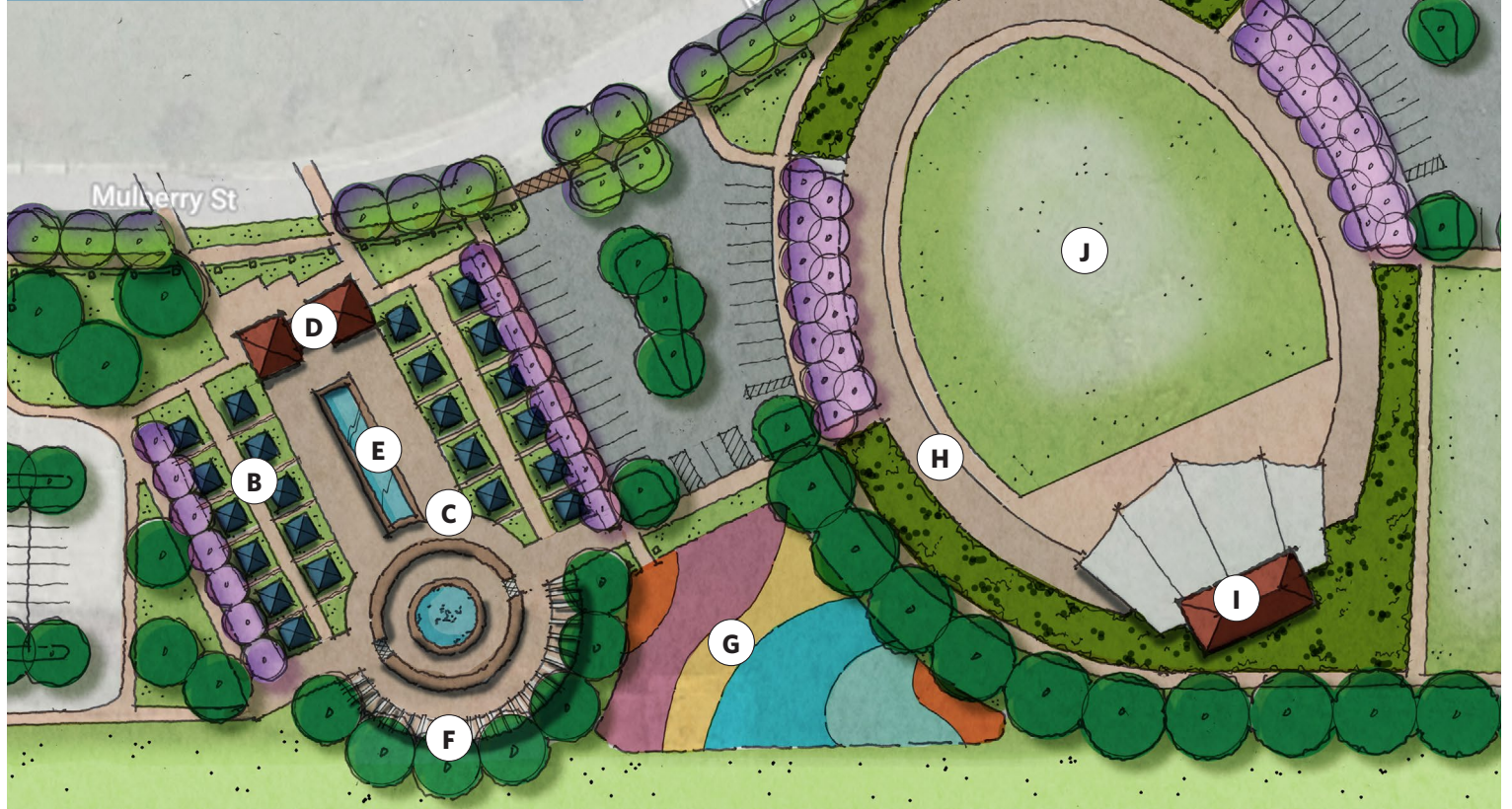


D
Restrooms



E
Water Feature

Making a Festival Park
The components of a good festival park can be arranged and scaled to meet the needs of communities of all sizes in SWLA. Having a variety of these parks in different sizes can not only allow for good public space, but can allow communities to share ideas and best practices for getting the most out of their spaces.



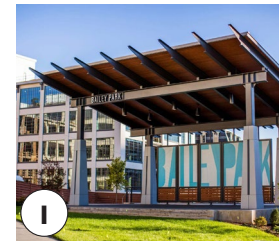
F
Trellis



G
Playground



H
Food Trucks



I
Stage



J
Lawn Area

ACTION STEPS

Parks and Streetscaping

Implementation of strong Downtowns will be unique to each of the areas that take on the project, but they can all follow a similar format and rely on each other for best practices and lessons learned.

1 Fund and Implement Streetscape Projects

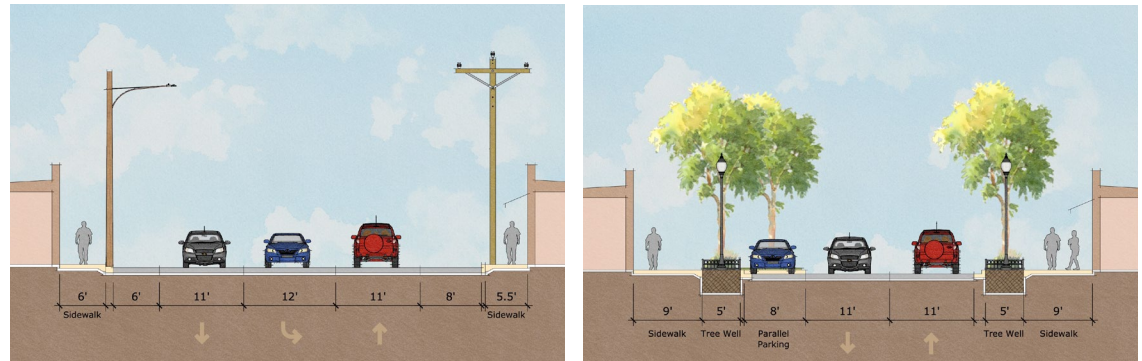
Starting with the streets, each strong Downtown can create a framework for other development to build from. Streetscape projects should be focused on walkability, the inclusion of green infrastructure, and creating space for businesses to actively engage with the street. Existing ordinances and codes should allow for sidewalk cafes and signage that engages with the street. Walkability goes beyond just having a sidewalk, but that sidewalk being wide, engaging, attractive, and protected. Adding elements like bike lanes, planters, and on-street parking can help enhance those feelings of walkability. As municipalities develop plans for complete streets, these should be studied at different scales so that they can be shared and implemented in other communities.

Strong Downtowns

Action Steps

- 1 Fund and implement streetscape projects to make Downtowns more walkable, to improve drainage, and to encourage active uses
- 2 Build festival parks on publicly owned land that can double as green infrastructure and improved drainage
- 3 Identify locations for infill housing, retail, and community amenities in Downtowns
- 4 Attract and support small businesses, shops, and creative industries

Each Downtown in SWLA implements stronger streets and community space with new infill opportunities for local businesses and creatives



Example street plans and sections can be shared between communities in SWLA to help with lessons learned and best practices when working on streetscape projects

PARKS AND STREETSCAPING



2 Build Festival Parks

With more walkable streets in the design, communities can focus on the development of festival parks. These parks should go beyond current municipal parks because they should have a purpose, a space to hold the gatherings that are unique and specific to each community. This begins by identifying a space and potential uses for that space, focusing on linking the park with the walkable streetscape projects. Festival parks should act as a heart for each community.

Infill

3 Identify Locations for Infill

With the framework of more walkable streets into implementation and with a new location to hold community festivals and events, strategic locations for building revitalization and infill development can become clear. Food trucks that set up in the festival park may look for a brick and mortar space, a vendor at a farmer's market may open a shop. These opportunities for infill should be identified, focusing on what best connects to the new streetscape projects and festival park.

Attract and Support

4 Attract and Support Small Businesses

After identifying spaces for infill, the process of working to attract, retain, and support small businesses, shops and creatives begins. Connecting these small owners to potential funding sources, creating new streams of funding, and offering incentives for the redevelopment of existing Downtown buildings can help reinforce the work being done to make each Downtown stronger. Utilizing existing chambers of commerce to create a network for these small businesses and creatives is also critical to supporting them as they fill the storefronts of stronger Downtowns throughout the region.



Potential Partners

- Municipal & Parish governments
- Small businesses
- Housing developers
- SWLA Economic Development Alliance
- Developers, businesses, and landowners
- West Calcasieu Chamber of Commerce
- North Lake Charles Chamber of Commerce



Potential Funding Sources

- Current economic development districts
- State Capital Outlay (road budgets)
- State and federal DOTD grants
- HMGP
- City/Parish general funds
- Restore LA Small Business Loan and Grant Program
- Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) competitive grants
- EDA funding for small business attraction and minority-owned businesses
- LA DOTD Safe Routes to Public Places (LA Complete Streets Program)
- LA Culture, Recreation, and Tourism funding
- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Creative Placemaking grants
- USDA placemaking grants



IMPLEMENTATION

HOW?	COST	TIME FRAME	POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES	LEAD ENTITY	SUPPORTING PARTNERS/ENTITIES
Fund and implement streetscape projects to make Downtowns more walkable, to improve drainage, and to encourage active uses	\$150-\$300 per linear foot of infrastructure	2-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development Districts State Capital Outlay budget LA DOTD Safe Routes to Public Places (LA Complete Streets Program) Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) competitive grants NEA Creative Placemaking grants 	Calcasieu Parish Cameron Parish	LA DOTD Regional Planning and Development Commission
Build festivals parks on publicly owned land that can double as green infrastructure and improve drainage	TBD	2-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HMPG Parish general funds LA Culture, Recreation, and Tourism funding NEA Creative Placemaking grants USDA placemaking grants 	Local municipality or parish for each Downtown location	Calcasieu Parish Cameron Parish Visit Lake Charles
Identify locations for infill housing, retail, and community amenities in Downtowns	TBD	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD 	Local municipality or parish for each Downtown location	Developers and investors Local business owners
Attract & support small business, shops, and creative industries	n/a	0-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restore LA Small Business Loan and Grant Program 	SWLA Economic Development Alliance	Calcasieu Parish Cameron Parish Visit Lake Charles



An example of porous pavement



An example of a curb extension with native planting



Porous pavement is one way greener infrastructure can be introduced as a streetscape project. Allowing water to drain through the pavement can help reduce flooding. More information about porous pavement can be found in the appendix.



Curb extensions are another opportunity for introducing green infrastructure into streetscape initiatives. Site-specific vegetation filters and transpires stormwater, while enhancing the streetscape. Underdrain also ensures the proper drain-down of stormwater infrastructure.