



Revitalization DOWNTOWN STREETSCAPE

A COHESIVE VISION FOR OUR DOWNTOWN

A plan to Rejuvenate our business district to create a stronger community, increase property values, and make South River a friendlier place to live, do business, and raise a family.

Plan: Downtown Streetscape



SMALL EFFORTS WITH
BIG
EFFECT

THE CARMICHAEL

OVERALL GOALS

UNIVERSAL & DISTINCT DESIGN



- Install pedestrian-centric features that represents and articulates South River's personality.
- Create a design toolkit that define assets with a consistent look and feel defining South River's business district.

COHESIVE PARKING VISION



- Admit we have parking paradox—having, too few [public] parking spots and too many [private] spots at the same time—and begin to developing a cohesive solution to this problem.
- Begin implementing this solution cohesively.

EXPRESSING BORO PERSONALITY



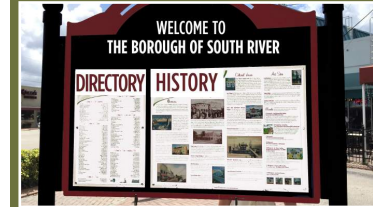
- Utilize opportunities to express branding.
- Use signage, parking areas, and other elements to create sense of place.
- Develop ways to extend physical location to virtual communities.

SUPPORTING RETAIL EXPRESSION



- Develop toolkit for good retail façade design.
- Utilize rehabilitation tools to provide façade grant program to stimulate business investment.
- Eliminate ordinances and policy in town that prohibit creative and unique retail formats.

DEVELOP WAYFARING SOLUTIONS



- Identify walking arteries in the downtown and establish identifying signage.
- Develop voluntary programs that give businesses opportunities to market themselves.
- Reinforce placemaking and history.



ESTABLISH SENSE OF PLACE



- Placemaking must be an important goal of everything we do.
- Continue to dialogue with businesses to further reinforce our borough's brand, personality, and strong history.
- Invest in assets that express that unique brand.

GREENING OUR DOWNTOWN



- Strategically select and space trees in the downtown that accentuate our streetscape.
- Use greenery, trees, and plants to liven deactivated spaces.
- Work to develop new programs that gets the community involved in beautifying downtown.

ENCOURAGING WALKABILITY



- Develop policies and ordinances that "complete the streets" to welcome foot traffic.
- Identify and reinforce walking arteries.
- Begin removing impediments that create vacancies in our downtown and fill in holes to ensure more continuous, active streets.

REINFORCING OUR STRENGTHS



- Our historic downtown is an asset that must be embraced.
- Identify and articulate a personality that is distinctly South River.
- Work with our existing businesses to further develop assets that are underutilized.

SUPPORTING ARTS & CULTURE



- Establish ordinances that welcome—not discourage creative expression.
- Provide support for organizations desiring to put on stimulating town events.
- Give businesses an opportunity to get involved, if interested.

A PHILOSOPHY AND FOUNDATION TO BUILD UPON

- ❶ Strong downtowns takes time and are not created overnight.
- ❷ Strong downtowns are honest about their strengths and weaknesses.
- ❸ Strong downtowns build upon these strengths and address their weaknesses.
- ❹ Strong downtowns requires a long-term vision and planning.
- ❺ A strong plan must be inclusive, cohesive, yet flexible.
- ❻ Plans must be optimistic and open-minded and willing to take risks.
- ❼ In order to be long-term, any plan must be above partisan bickering, to ensure they last because they are good ideas, not knocked down simply because they are the other side's ideas.
- ❽ No one-size fits all and thus, any successful plan must utilize all of the revitalization tools available to them.

A LONG-TERM VISION NEEDS TO START SOMEWHERE AND BE CONSTANTLY REVISITED.

A Distinct and Welcoming Personality



1



2



3



4



5



6

1

Signage that is distinctly South River

While the DOT has rules that regulate certain aspects of street signage, they do permit different hardware and colors that help brand our downtown.

2

Accessories that create cohesion

Purchasing accessories that carry our personality to other elements of the downtown are an inexpensive way to elevate the feel of the downtown.

3

Separate places for bikes to park

Because we currently ignore bicycles, patrons tend to lock them up on poles that create hazards in the downtown. We should provide solutions for all types of transportation.

4

Unified design of trash receptacles

Presently, we have a variety of trash can designs on our sidewalks which fail to provide a cohesion to our business district.

5

Street banners reflecting design

Street pole banners are a fairly inexpensive way to communicate events and the sense of place unique to South River.

6

Modern planters that green downtown

Our planters must be updated to reflect modern taste and to provide year round green accents to the downtown.

Good design matters. Design is not as much about aesthetics as it is about communicating information to help solve problems.

Gateways to the Borough

Our Downtown is missing opportunities for patrons to develop emotional attachment to public spaces in South River. Businesses can only do so much to extend their experience onto the sidewalks and streets. We need to examine our existing opportunities and create “gateways” that usher residents and visitors and give them a sense of place when in our downtown.

We should examine opportunities, especially those on our poles, our sidewalks, walkways, and at the borders of our borough.

Alleymaking



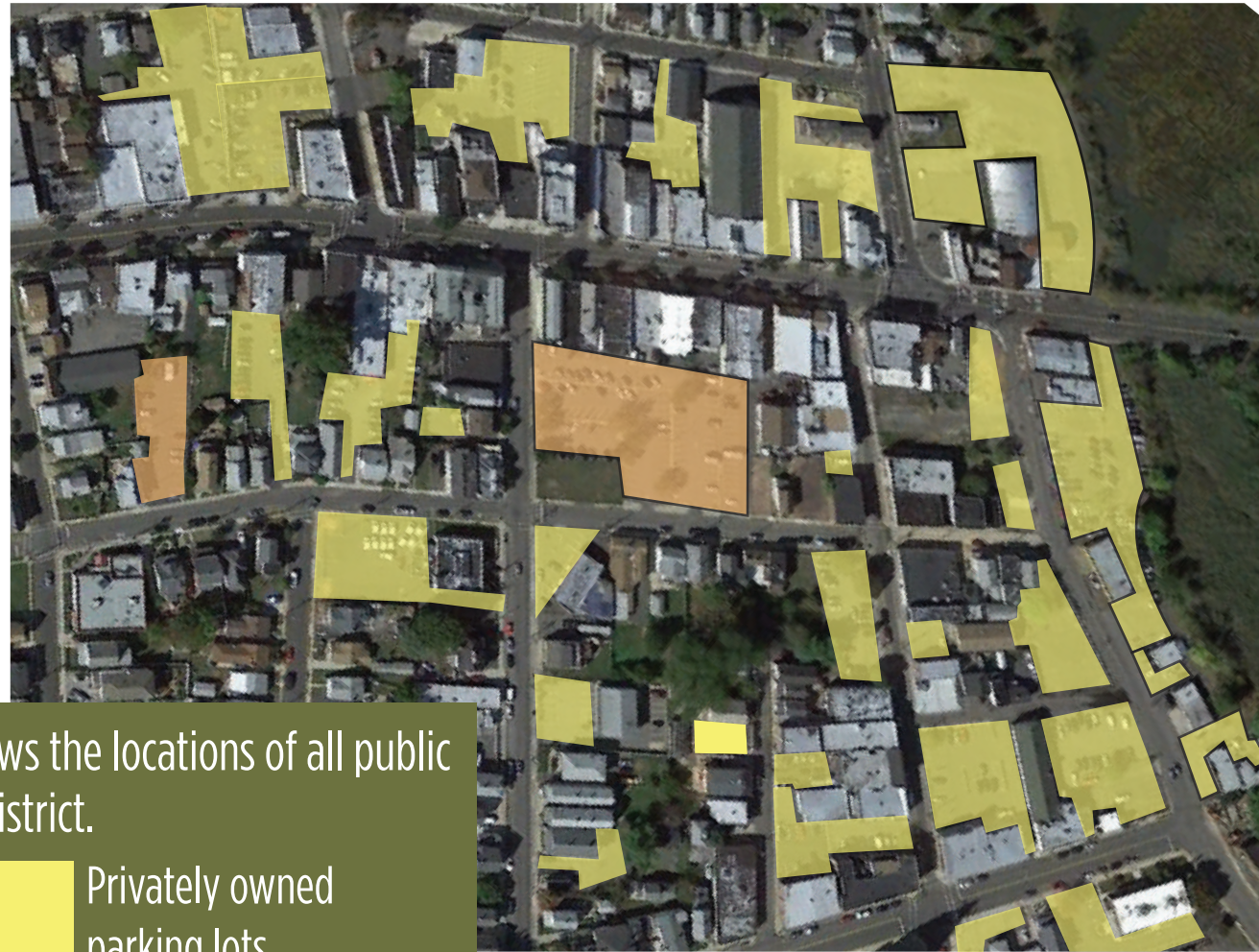
We've begun discussions with the owners of the properties adjacent to the Alleyway connecting Main Street to our public parking lot. We want to transform this space into a gateway to the downtown, beginning the process of creating common arteries for walking traffic.



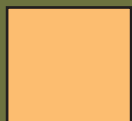
Creating Sense of Place

A competitive advantage of a true downtown is that it becomes a destination with a personality distinct from the stores within it.

*“There’s
nowhere
to park”*



This overhead view of the downtown shows the locations of all public and private parking lots in the business district.



Municipal owned
Public Parking lots



Privately owned
parking lots

As you can see from the image above South River faces a parking challenge. One of the greatest concerns that residents cite when discussing our business district is that “there’s nowhere to park.” Yet, as you can see, there are plenty of parking lots in the downtown. The reason for this paradox is due to the lack of centralized planning and policies developed around parking. Businesses have been left on their own to address parking concerns that would be better managed by and should be the interest of a central body such as the parking utility or the governing body. The problem today isn’t that there’s not enough parking, it’s that there’s not enough *useful* parking. Developing a cohesive plan can begin to change that truth.

A Cohesive Parking Plan



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NEW BROUGH PARKING OPPORTUNITIES

GOAL As a borough, we need to commit to developing a larger, cohesive vision for parking in the downtown to ensure that business can flourish without having to worry about parking. This means examining our code, examining opportunities for new lots, and encouraging models of development that support the type of business South River attracts.

IMPROVED IDENTIFICATION

South River is a “pass through” for outside visitors, that we’d like to convert into customers. We need to better identify where the public can park. “Municipal” parking is ambiguous to the average person. “Public Parking” better communicates this message.

DIRECTING PURPOSE AFTER PARKING

It is important that we understand the paths visitors take after parking and ensure that they are safe, attractive, create commercial arteries, create a sense of place and properly inform. We must work to reinforce them.



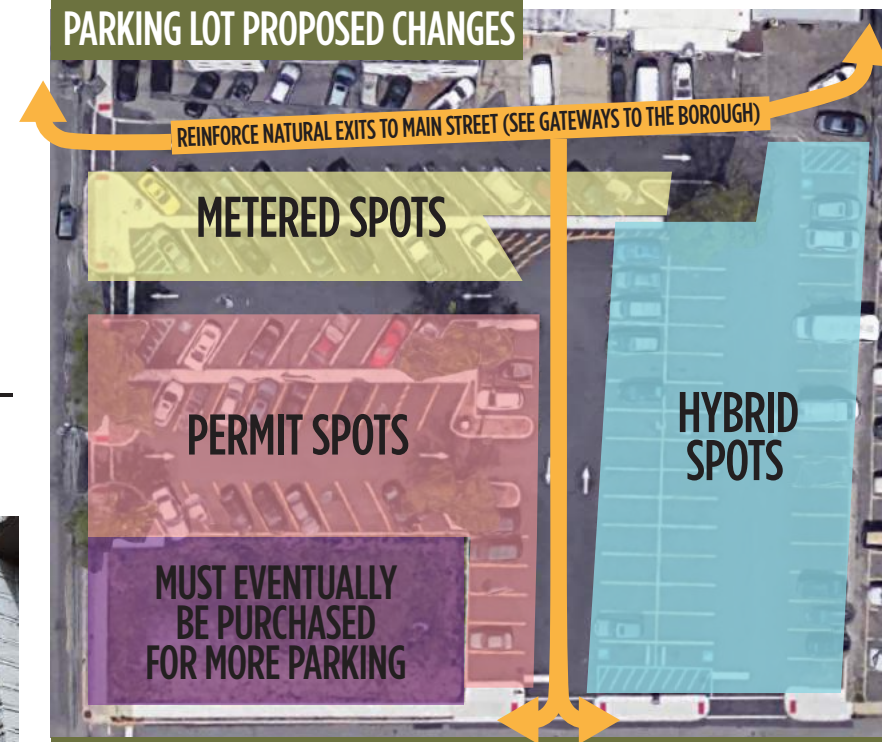
Distance Matters

Much research has been conducted on parking/walking patterns and the two most important aspects are:

Distance People estimate parking distance based upon length of walk. They will tolerate some distance, but the max tolerated distance tends to be about 10 minutes.

Mental Stimulation A person’s tolerance of distance can be altered based upon how pleasant and mentally stimulating their walk is. If the walk is mentally boring, their tolerance drops.

PARKING LOT PROPOSED CHANGES



OUR CURRENT PUBLIC PARKING LOT

The present “heart” of our downtown, our municipal lot is one of our existing strengths that must be reinforced and further developed. Not only should we rethink the present configuration, parking rules, branding treatment, and our focus on building natural arterial routes to the downtown, but we need to ultimately find additional public parking opportunities.

- Proper planning would lend itself to expanding our business district into Whitehead Avenue, down Water Street, Reid and Prospect Streets, even further up Jackson Street, and potentially even connecting the southside of George Street to the downtown.
- This vision is perhaps decades out, but cohesive plans should include plans that far into the future as it informs today's plans.



Supporting Retail Expression



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OFFER RESOURCES THAT STRENGTHEN FAÇADES Individual expression is an important part of a vibrant independent downtown. Rather than being overly restrictive and limit the style of facades in the downtown, we must offer a façade program that allows business owners to invest in their storefront. We must also work to develop a toolkit to offer guidance on good storefront design. Any program developed must ensure that it provides assistance in ways that are fully voluntary and that get out of the way so as to not needlessly restrict businesses.



Respecting our past by embracing and incorporating elements of classic facades helps bring cohesiveness and ensures we carry our history into our future.



Developing policy and ordinances that encourage patrons to be part of overall “hustling and bustling” helps build a critical mass of foot traffic.



While there are limitless ways of expressing good facade design, good facades generally have certain traits. We need to highlight examples that utilize these traits.

EMBRACING HISTORY BY FORGING A NEW PATH



History can live on in new ways. Our past shouldn't inhibit our future and we should look at repurposing our history as times change. For instance, we can take historic bricks and turn them into welcoming columns at the borough borders.

TREES THAT DON'T INTERFERE WITH STOREFRONTS



Trees serve an important purpose to bringing life downtown, but mustn't get in the way of storefront signage.

DEVELOP A STRONG SENSE OF PLACE FOR PATRONS



Signage is an opportunity to partner with business and to establish South River as a place with a strong history and bright future.

Revitalizing using “All the Tools”



SMALL EFFORTS WITH
BIG
EFFECT



EMBRACING INSPIRATION Not everything works everywhere, but being open to new ideas can lead to traditions of the future.



Ensuring that patrons are given a sense of place is necessary.



Vacant lots don't need to be an eyesore and can even tempt the imagination.



Allowing culture and artistic expression is a key to ensuring our downtown develops a distinct personality.



Ensuring that the community can take part and interact with public spaces is key.

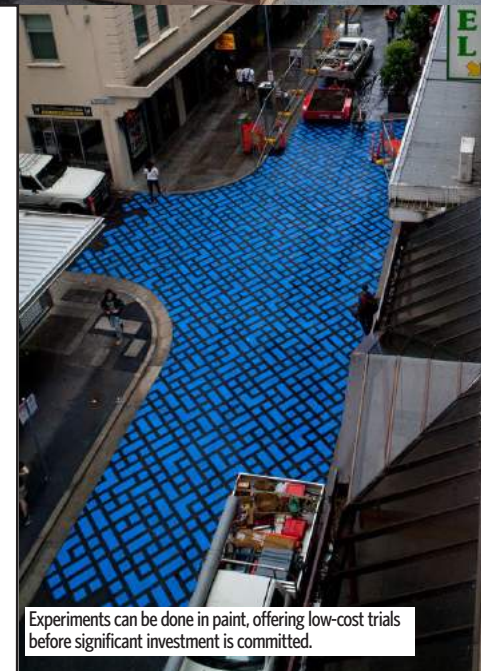


Trying new things can be temporary experiments and can offer new energies that spur new development.

REVITALIZING IS A MULTI-PRONG APPROACH

It takes a variety of efforts to develop a strong downtown. Here's some of the tools necessary to make it work.

- Eliminating regulation that gets in the way or that discourages new business.
 - Reducing fixed costs, like electricity, that inhibit business.
- Creating a business packet to simplify opening business in town.
 - Utilizing other legal tools such as rehabilitation and redevelopment as part of the toolbox, but also understanding their weaknesses.
- Considering outside funding opportunities to assist when possible.
 - Developing public-private partnerships to ensure robust, continued efforts.
- Connecting developers to stimulate new partnerships that aren't possible alone.
 - Actually listening to, and assisting business when possible.



Experiments can be done in paint, offering low-cost trials before significant investment is committed.



Being open-minded to having culture spill out onto the sidewalks creates emotional attachment to the town.

Our Plan



We plan on moving aggressively to begin implementing this vision because South River can't wait. We've been talking and studying and proposing and arguing about how to strengthen our downtown while existing businesses suffer and residents look elsewhere for evening culture and enjoyment. Each year, the State provides us with a Housing and Community Development block grant that the borough has not used over the past few years. We plan on utilizing this money to cover a large portion of the expenses and utilize a combination of new programs, borough investment, and grant opportunities to cover the expenses of the rest. The entire plan will take years to achieve but we've identified a plan of action for how to begin implementing these items and are looking to invest smartly to protect taxpayers' wallets.

PHASE 1

Temporarily remove trees interfering with storefronts and provide access to perform streetscape changes without issue.

Purchase banners to inform visitors and residents of the pending changes and to pardon our appearance.

Begin to implement parking changes beginning with reducing the metered hours to encourage business patronage in evening and overall design and setup of Borough parking lot.

Create agreement with and create a warm welcoming alleyway to connect Borough parking lot to Main Street.

PHASE 2

Improve ramps and add railings at crosswalk ramps in the same visual scheme to provide safety and consistency to project.

Purchase and install new assets for the Main Street and side streets to ensure a uniform look and feel and begin to establish personality and sense of place.

Begin working with businesses to develop new opportunities for them, working with our Economic Development Commission to make the process of opening business easier.

Begin connecting business owners with similar interests to begin discussions of ways to make improvements to existing properties.

PHASE 3

Strengthen existing "gateways" in the downtown to continue building borough personality, establish boundaries, and sense of place.

Begin process of creating new ways in which the borough can provide additional and more easily accessible parking for patrons to reduce business' responsibility of providing parking as part of its concern. Look for new revenue opportunities.

Look at strategies to "expand the downtown" by reinforcing existing pathways, improving walkability, and "connecting the loop."

Develop a completely optional business incentive program that informs business and gives them new opportunities to market.

Throughout the entire process, we must evaluate and adjust, based upon current realities.

Acknowledgements



This plan was developed through discussions, concepts, and brainstorming over the course of five months in a variety of Borough committees/commissions/boards. We want to thank the various contributions of the Public Safety Committee, Finance Committee, Green Team, Communications Committee, and Environmental/Shade Tree Commission. As we begin implementing this plan, our goal is to continue discussions with additional committees and welcome them into the discussions.

This plan was developed without cost to the Borough.

This plan is intended as a strategic guideline for how we should proceed to begin revitalizing our downtown. Most of the items discussed are based on principles we believe are essential to reinforce our existing strengths and should be explored. We have a clear implementation plan but this effort will be a work in progress and will be adjusted and reconsidered each step of the way.

This is a longterm vision. Our hope is that it will eventually be adopted into the master plan.

Learn more at:

<http://southrivernj.org/revitalization/>