



# *Macon, Georgia* **SOCIABLE CITY PLAN**



**SOCIABLE CITY PLAN PREPARED FOR NEWTOWN MACON | MARCH 2021**  
**PREPARED BY THE RESPONSIBLE HOSPITALITY INSTITUTE | RHIWEB.ORG**



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 March 2021

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# MACON: A SOCIAL ECONOMY IN TRANSITION

A first-time visitor to downtown Macon would see the brick buildings and spacious, clean sidewalks and likely remark on its small-town charm.



Easily walkable with “good bones” (as described in the 2015 Macon Action Plan), downtown is dotted with cafes, cozy restaurants, taverns and bars, as well as a few performance venues for live music.

On First Fridays especially, downtown comes alive with energy and excitement. Musicians play in outdoor patios or on median park while people leisurely stroll with drinks in hand. It’s easy to understand why downtown Macon is considered the entertainment destination for Central Georgia and beyond. The burgeoning community of downtown residents and employees are fiercely loyal to downtown, as evidenced by the *Shop Local*

campaigns at the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the continued efforts to patronize small businesses to keep them afloat during the resulting economic hardship.

## Change on the Horizon

The pandemic arrived when downtown Macon was in an uphill growth track. Although some progress was halted, change continues to progress forward, which may have a positive impact on Macon’s expanding social economy. A few changes on the horizon include the following.

- ▣ **The comprehensive master plan for Macon-Bibb County** will be updated in 2021, which will require public outreach meetings. This could be an opportunity to envision updates that would benefit downtown’s social economy.
- ▣ **A major overhaul is set to reorganize the Business Development Services department**, a welcome change for many stakeholders. The business and alcohol licensing process has already been absorbed by a new department with newly hired staff taking a fresh look at how to remove barriers and streamline the process.
- ▣ **A new hotel has been approved for downtown**, providing an opportunity to update development strategies for mixed-use development, such as sound mitigation strategies. These updates can potentially help to proactively address quality of life issues.

**Disclaimer:** RHI’s report provides a summary of Downtown Macon’s social economy based on research, observational tours, on-site meetings and virtual interviews. Not all information and perceptions reported necessarily reflect the opinions of sponsors or coordinators of the project.

## RHI's Sociable City Project in Downtown Macon

The Responsible Hospitality Institute (RHI) was invited to work with NewTown Macon thanks to a grant from the Knight Foundation and additional funding from the Business Improvement District to help facilitate safe and vibrant growth in the “social economy.”<sup>1</sup> The focus of the report’s analysis and recommendations is on the social economy contained within Downtown Macon (the Central Business District). However, some findings and suggested actions may address systemic challenges and issues that may affect social venues countywide.

Once the pandemic made its way to Central Georgia, it became apparent that the project’s focus needed to pivot to plan for the long-term success and sustainability of the social economy. RHI stayed in close contact with stakeholders in Macon during the period of “pause” when shelter-in-place rules were implemented and businesses were closed, as well as the period of reopening. Despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic, there was a sense of renewed hope and an appetite for change.

### Vision of Downtown Macon

#### Who does the social economy serve? Who is being left out?

Prior to the pandemic, project participants expressed an aspirational vision of Macon as “trendy” and “cutting edge.” Atlanta was often cited as a model for downtown’s nightlife to replicate, especially for participants of color. Others disagreed, saying they wanted Macon to “not be like any other city,” to be a unique focal point for Middle Georgia’s entertainment. Participants also envisioned Macon as an active “music city” again by leveraging the city’s cultural assets and music legacy to grow tourism.

A women’s focus group expressed the desire for downtown be “more welcoming, diverse and inviting” for women of different ages, life stages, races/ethnicities and sexual orientations. Environmental changes to facilitate walkability at night was a major factor identified to improve the perception of public safety downtown. Women also identified ambience and design preferences to make venues feel more welcoming and comfortable to broaden the patron market.

If you dig into the history of Macon, the question of “who is downtown for?” becomes more prominent.

The painful history of Macon still makes some members of the African American community, which comprise 54.1% of the population (per U.S. Census Bureau estimates as of 2019), feel unwelcome downtown. Since the 2020 social justice movement, there is a heightened awareness and greater recognition of the need for diversity, equity and inclusion in all aspects of society, including downtown’s social economy. The update of the Macon Action Plan recently was released to the public and the refresh clearly states a priority centered on creating a downtown where everyone feels welcome. With this newly adopted plan, we anticipate resolution is imminent.



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<sup>1</sup> RHI defines the social economy as the venues and events that facilitate sociability in the form of dining, entertainment, events and nightlife.

## Sociability During the Pandemic

Georgia has notably fewer state-level restrictions on hospitality industry operations compared with other states. Meanwhile, the population of Macon-Bibb county seems to have a higher comfort level with indoor socializing, as well as a demand for less, not more, health-related safety guidelines such as mask-wearing in public. The county was late to adopt a mask-mandate for public spaces and provides a loophole for businesses to opt out of the mask-mandate on private property. Fear was reported among hospitality business operators that being too strict on health procedures would



make downtown customers flee to the suburbs and chain restaurants, where rules are looser.

**Restaurants have weathered the economic storm from COVID-19 fairly well, but other, non-food service business models, like bars/clubs and live music venues, are struggling to survive.** Bars (less so restaurants) are targeted more heavily to abide by capacity restrictions. Live music and other performance venues have not been able to pivot or reopen in a revenue-producing manner. Although people are still going out in Macon, especially showing their support on First Fridays, others are still fearful of going out. In general, people are opting for earlier nights in less crowded environments.

## The Cultural and Economic Value of the Social Economy

Prior to the pandemic, few truly understood the broad-reaching economic value of the social economy. Businesses that comprise the social economy (i.e. bars, restaurants, music venues, events, etc.) are a significant source of employment and a contributor to taxes and general funds. They also directly and indirectly support companies that provide products (e.g. food, beverages, equipment, supplies) and services (graphic design, printing, insurance, accounting). Opportunities to socialize are a key attraction in marketing for tourism, education, downtown residential and company relocation.

In Downtown Macon, social venues prior to the pandemic comprised less than a third (30%) of downtown's businesses (per an RHI inventory July 2020). But don't let the numbers fool you. The pandemic revealed just how much downtown businesses depended on social venues.

Downtown is a symbiotic ecosystem that is highly dependent on the success of social venues. This fact was never so apparent as when concerts and church services ground to a halt. Restaurants and retailers alike have been affected by the loss from these key markets at lunch and dinner time. Although many businesses are still in operation, some have been put on hold, while others have closed permanently. The loss of employment, tax revenues, etc. will have significant long-term impacts on the county's budget.



## Public Safety Remains an Ongoing Challenge

Social venues are a significant economic engine, but they also require resources to ensure public safety of the people who patronize them. Even prior to the pandemic, the current resource allocation



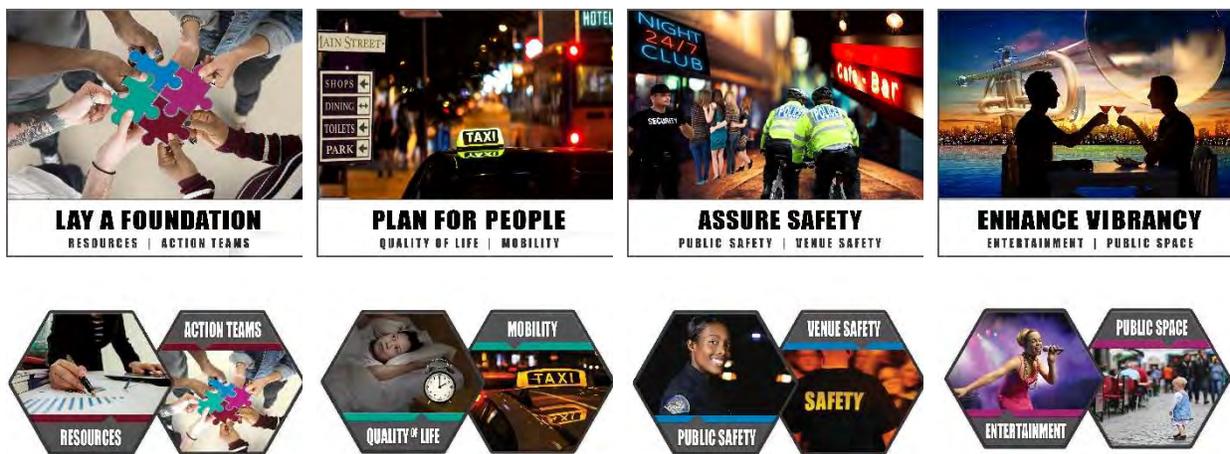
was insufficient to manage the existing crowds from nighttime social activity. The county’s consolidation resulted in less sheriff’s officers with more area to cover. On two nights of the week, only one officer is deployed downtown at night; on the other nights, there are just two. Business operators are concerned by the slow response to calls for service; meanwhile, law enforcement is concerned with the safety of their officers in the event of a largescale conflict. It is a difficult situation, one that frustrates law enforcement and business operators alike.

Although there is an atmosphere of “no one watching” the risk is low for the most part, except for some notable exceptions (e.g. the incident after Thanksgiving 2020). Luckily, many businesses are engaged in meetings and hold each other accountable to keep downtown safe. However, for Downtown Macon to continue to have substantial growth while maintaining public safety,

dedicated resources will be required for more effective risk management.

## Building Blocks of a Sociable City

RHI’s framework to evaluate a city’s nighttime economy is based upon “Four Building Blocks” and “Six Core Measures” of a sociable city. RHI’s four Building Blocks (Lay a Foundation, Plan for People, Assure Safety, Enhance Vibrancy) are used as an overarching framework to evaluate a nighttime economy. The last three building blocks (Planning, Safety and Vibrancy) are further divided into Six Core Measures of a nighttime economy, which represent specific areas for action. RHI analyzed downtown Macon’s strengths and challenges, and generated the action plan, based on this framework.



## Sources of Information

Information presented in this report was generated from a variety of sources, including RHI staff observations; remote and on-site interviews and meetings; online research; and background reports.

# ACTION PLAN SNAPSHOT

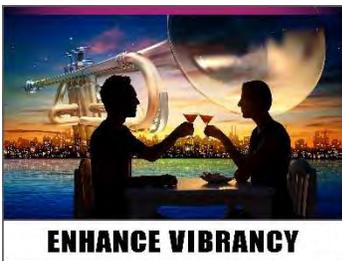
Recommendations in the following sections provide suggestions based on feedback from project participants, as well as RHI’s research and expertise. Recommendations are not meant to be prescriptive, but to provide a template for consideration that can be adapted to the vision of Macon as a sociable city.



- 1 >> FORM A SOCIAL ECONOMY ALLIANCE TO CENTRALIZE RESOURCES
- 2 >> CONDUCT AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS TO ESTABLISH A BASELINE MEASURE
- 3 >> IDENTIFY IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LICENSING AND PERMITTING PROCESS



- 1 >> ESTABLISH A PUBLIC SAFETY TEAM WITH RESOURCES TO MANAGE RISK
- 2 >> FORMALIZE A HOSPITALITY AND NIGHTLIFE ASSOCIATION
- 3 >> SCHEDULE FORUMS TO FACILITATE COMPLIANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT



- 1 >> DOCUMENT MIX OF VENUES PROVIDING DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT
- 2 >> ESTABLISH GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC SPACE, VENDORS, PERFORMERS
- 3 >> SUPPORT PROCESS TO FORMALIZE MACON AS A MUSIC CITY



- 1 >> EVALUATE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ON THE SOCIAL ECONOMY
- 2 >> IDENTIFY UNDER-UTILIZED "DEAD ZONES" FOR IMPROVEMENT
- 3 >> DEVELOP SOUND MANAGEMENT POLICY AND MEDIATION STRATEGY



# LAY A FOUNDATION

## LAY A FOUNDATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL ECONOMY



Macon has an opportunity to continue to grow as a regional destination for sociability. Recognition of the value of the social economy is a key step to help mobilize public, private and government stakeholders to commit their resources and support. Many communities have found that an economic impact study is vital for raising awareness to earn hospitality businesses a “seat at the table.” Another foundational step will be to streamline

inefficiencies in licensing to make it intuitive and easy to open a business and comply with regulations. Finally, an alliance of key stakeholders representing diverse perspectives invested in or affected by the social economy will be a significant determinant of whether Macon will take its place among other great destinations for nightlife and sociability.

# LAY A FOUNDATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL ECONOMY

## 1 FORM A SOCIAL ECONOMY ALLIANCE TO CENTRALIZE RESOURCES

### OVERVIEW

Successful coordination and implementation of this Action Plan will require a group of dedicated individuals working on a common vision of Macon’s future as a destination for dining, entertainment and sociability. Cities throughout the world have recognized the need for dedicated staff to focus on the social economy, demonstrated in creation of “Night Manager” positions and Offices of Nightlife.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

Macon does not currently have an organized county-level group that represents different perspectives to examine the unique challenges and needs of a safe, vibrant social economy.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Social Economy Resource Alliance is proposed to achieve the following objectives:

- ☐ Guide government and business leaders on decision-making.
- ☐ Identify issues and remove barriers that inhibit the operation of safe, vibrant places to socialize.
- ☐ Streamline business opening and event applications to be simple and intuitive.
- ☐ Advocate for legislative changes and resource reallocation for public health and safety.
- ☐ Represent the perspective of the social economy on county-level boards and committees.
- ☐ Facilitate implementation of priority actions.

### IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **NewTown Macon will serve as a designated “coordinator” of the Alliance to convene meetings, document outcomes and serve as the liaison to government, business and community leaders.**

- ☐ **Identify proposed members of the Alliance.** The **Social Economy Resource Alliance** will ideally launch with broad stakeholder representation. RHI suggests a total of 12 members with 2 stakeholders representing 6 perspectives:



ROLE	NAME	ORGANIZATION
SAFETY: Licensing		
SAFETY: Compliance		
HOSPITALITY: Dining		
HOSPITALITY: Tourism		
DATA: Economic		
DATA: Safety		
CULTURE: Music		
CULTURE: Performance		
COMMUNITY: Residents		
COMMUNITY: Advocates		
DEVELOPMENT: Planning		
DEVELOPMENT: Mobility		



- ☐ **Identify permanent staff to coordinate** and convene the Alliance.
- ☐ **Explore how to formalize the Social Economy Resource Alliance** through either legislation, commission appointments or as an advisory group to NewTown Macon.

# 2

## CONDUCT AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS TO ESTABLISH A BASELINE MEASURE

### OVERVIEW

Conducting an economic analysis can achieve heightened recognition and legitimacy for the social economy. Compiling and analyzing information about the fiscal, economic and employment impacts of the social economy can help establish a baseline measure to better understand patterns of growth, decline and renewal as downtown emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

The value of downtown Macon's social economy is not fully recognized, therefore opportunities may not be fully developed or supported with sufficient resources.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The study's results can be used in a variety of ways, including:

- ▣ **Identify appropriate allocation of resources** and public safety services to better manage social activity as a continued source of economic vitality.
- ▣ **Raise public awareness about nightlife** and the social economy as a legitimate economic sector and viable economic engine by promoting their fiscal, economic and employment contributions.
- ▣ **Elevate the professional status and communication** of nightlife businesses.
- ▣ **Propel greater coordination between government and nightlife representatives** to collaborate on sustaining vitality, while also reducing safety and quality of life impacts.
- ▣ **Track industry growth and change** by conducting assessments on a regular basis.

### IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **Members of the Social Economy Resource Alliance will identify resources and oversee the study's implementation.**

- ▣ **Determine objectives and impact types** (e.g. arts and culture, economics, fiscal revenue, community, real estate, tourism).
- ▣ **Adjust study design based on needs** (e.g. geography, industry focus, time parameters, available data, capacity of local partners and budget).
- ▣ **Collect data:** Assign roles; Create a work plan; Collect data through 3rd party data, business surveys and visitor surveys.
- ▣ **Analyze data** and create a user-friendly report geared to a range of audiences and expertise.
  - Explain methodology for analyzing data.
  - Explain how to communicate findings and list target audiences.
  - Identify policy implications.
- ▣ **Communicate findings** to key stakeholders and decision makers.

# 3

## IDENTIFY IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LICENSING AND PERMITTING PROCESS

### OVERVIEW

Licensing a new hospitality business (and renewing an existing business) is an opportunity to help prepare that business to operate safely and in compliance. There are three potential touch points when guidelines can be reviewed and evaluated: at business opening, at renewal and as a remedial intervention for businesses not in compliance. The business application or renewal authorization should cover three areas: (1) a business plan, (2) alcohol management plan and (3) a security, safety and sound management plan.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

County decision-makers can improve their understanding of the planned business models of the businesses they grant licenses to. On-premise businesses are not currently required to submit any of the aforementioned plans (at either the application or renewal process) describing their intended business model or how they plan to operate safely while minimizing harm and quality of life impacts.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

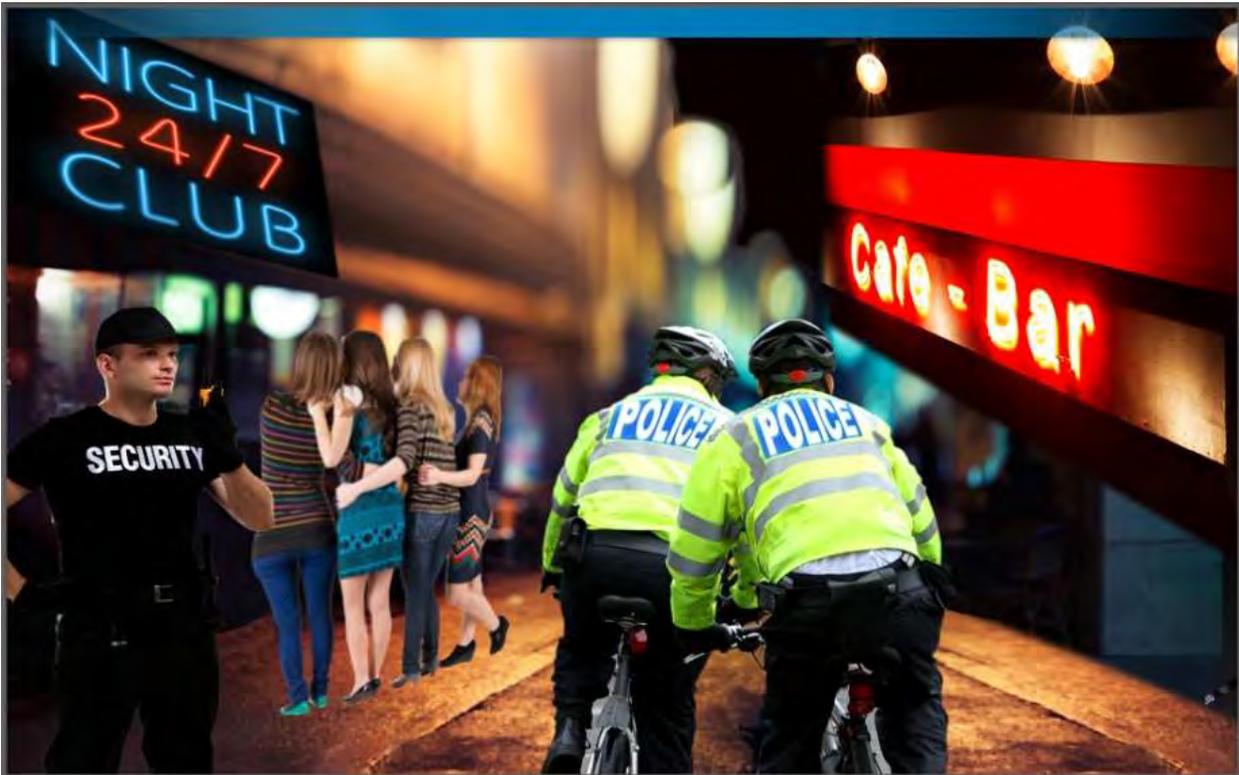
- ▣ **Embed proactive systems in the licensing and permitting process** (currently undergoing improvements under the direction of the Tax Commissioner's Office).
- ▣ **Business operators have plans** for mitigation of harm and risk.
- ▣ **Create a system to help business operators sustain compliance** with public safety regulations.
- ▣ **Create a level playing field** that all businesses will be held to the same standard of responsibility.

### IMPLEMENTATION

▸▸ **Engage Tax Commissioner's Office in incorporating recommendations into the current process.**

**Note:** Existing businesses will not be required to go through this process, unless they are identified as a nuisance establishment or out of compliance with rules and regulations.

- ▣ **Engage the Public Safety Team and the Nightlife and Hospitality Association** to serve as resources for the new process and to help vet new businesses.
- ▣ **Three thematic areas to be documented:**
  - **Business Plan:** The business model (and how the business will be operated), planned forms of entertainment, theme (if applicable), and products and services to be offered.
  - **Alcohol Management Plan:** Steps to reduce risk and harm associated with alcohol consumption, prevention of service to minors, and intervention strategies with at-risk individuals. Components may include staff training and use of ID checking technology.
  - **Security, Safety and Sound Management Plan:** Procedures for maintaining the premises, sound monitoring and mitigation from interior and exterior sources, maintaining occupancy, interior and exterior crowd management, patron queue management, lighting, and procedures for educating patrons about access to safe transportation home.



# ASSURE SAFETY

## REIMAGINE A PUBLIC SAFETY SYSTEM

### PUBLIC SAFETY



There is an opportunity to utilize the heightened focus on public safety following the November 2020 safety incident outside a nightclub to reimagine a new and improved strategy for public safety.

The Sheriff’s Office is challenged by resource limitations and an officer shortage. Until more officers can be hired, trained and deployed, Macon may need to expand its public safety strategy to other compliance and enforcement stakeholders to ensure the social economy receives the resources necessary to keep employees, patrons and residents safe.

### VENUE SAFETY



Downtown social venue operators are invested in their communities, yet many feel disillusioned about things they cannot change—such as the void in public safety oversight and coordination.

As a collective whole, they represent a potentially powerful alliance of business leaders who can embody the change they want to see. While hardest hit by pandemic-era restrictions, the hospitality industry is also known for its ability to adapt quickly to change to a “new reality.” If better coordinated, they can fill much of the void to ensure public safety.

# REIMAGINE PUBLIC SAFETY

## 1 >> ESTABLISH A PUBLIC SAFETY TEAM WITH RESOURCES TO MANAGE RISK

### OVERVIEW

Macon is at a critical junction to establish a sustainable alliance among public safety regulators, compliance officers and venue operators, management and staff to reduce risk from crime, violence, disorder and disturbances.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

The Macon-Bibb Sheriff's office is the primary law enforcement entity that deploys officers at night to maintain public safety downtown associated with the social economy, but the office is limited by resource shortages and a lack of officers. Engaging other safety partners will provide a broader, more comprehensive system for ensuring public safety.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A public safety team is intended to achieve the following objectives:

- ▣ Monitor trends
- ▣ Prioritize most common violations among multiple agencies
- ▣ Identify at-risk businesses for earlier assistance and intervention

### IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **Convene leadership from Macon-Bibb Sheriff's Office with representatives from other regulatory and compliance agencies to establish a formal public safety team.**

- ▣ **Convene representatives to serve on the Public Safety Team:**

REPRESENTATIVES	PRIORITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sheriff's Office</li><li>• Fire Department (Code Compliance)</li><li>• Tax Commissioner (Licensing)</li><li>• SAFEbuilt (Building Permits)</li><li>• Health Department</li><li>• Alcohol Regulatory</li><li>• Planning and Zoning</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Centralize inspection and service call data</li><li>• Educate new and existing businesses</li><li>• Facilitate more effective intervention with at-risk businesses</li><li>• Provide cross-training and collaboration opportunity for multiple city agencies</li><li>• Solve problems before they become chronic issues</li></ul>

- ▣ **Petition the county commissioners for additional resources to be dedicated to the Sheriff's office and other agencies** for the purpose of keeping downtown safe. Ensure resource allocation is based on population during Friday and Saturday nights (est. 7,000) and not based on geography.

- **Collect and assess safety data to make data-driven deployment decisions.** While public safety agencies routinely collect a multitude of data points, few are using the information to support nightlife district deployment or resource allocation. While this practice is frequently used by police agencies to address neighborhood crime and disorder through CompStat and similar models, this process has not typically been used in nightlife districts. Some potential data points to consider:
  - Aggravated Robbery
  - Aggressive Driving
  - Aggressive Panhandling
  - Assault Minor
  - Assault or Obstruction of Police
  - Assaults Causing Harm
  - Disorder
  - Emergency Room Transport
  - Gender Violence
  - Impaired Driving
  - Impaired Pedestrians: Injuries, Fatalities
  - Intoxicated Person/Drunkenness offence
  - Mugging/Purse/Phone Snatching
  - Pedestrian Violation
  - Possession of Drugs
  - Public order offences
  - Reckless Driving
  - Robbery
  - Underage Alcohol Possession
  - Underage Alcohol Purchase/Attempt
  - Vandalism - Criminal Damage
  - Vehicle Break-in and Theft
  
- **Allocate resources to appropriately staff, train and deploy officers.** As Macon continues to be a regional destination for social activity and hotspot for growth in downtown residential and hotel developments, a more strategic approach to resource allocation will be required.
- **Offer incentives to recruit officers who want to work in a nightlife district.** Nightlife district assignments should be considered a “special assignment” within the office’s policy and procedures.
- **Provide specialized training** on a variety of relevant topics including alcohol regulations, crisis intervention, etc. Even though there is recognition that nightlife policing requires a specific skill set, very few agencies provide formalized training to either new or incumbent members.
- **Develop clear procedures for use of technology** (e.g. BWCs, ID Scanners), which plays a key role in the evolution of nightlife policing. Shared communication technology allows multiple agencies to communicate and share information during daily operations and critical incidents. Body worn cameras offer opportunities to collect evidence, examine and assess officer and citizen behavior, evaluate environmental conditions, identify training needs, and reduce liability.
- **Apply CPTED and SARA to the nightlife district.** As nightlife policing continues to grow and expand, it is natural for successful contemporary policing techniques to be modified and applied to nightlife districts. Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED) and the Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Evaluation (SARA) Model have direct application to enhancing public safety in nightlife districts.

# 2

## FORMALIZE A HOSPITALITY AND NIGHTLIFE ASSOCIATION

### OVERVIEW

Hospitality and nightlife operators have unique challenges and needs. They have a much higher likelihood of successful advocacy for change when requests come from an organized group or representative of their industry. Although such groups tend to be mobilized by a crisis (and disband after), ideally, the group will evolve into a sustainable entity.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

Hospitality business operators in Downtown Macon are notably engaged in various informal groups and attend community meetings. However, no official forum exists for regularly meeting amongst themselves to discuss their unique issues and needs. Further, it is difficult for county government and law enforcement to work together with hospitality businesses when they are a disparate group of individual operators, rather than a unified group with a designated representative/leader who can serve as one voice for the industry.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- ▣ **Creation of a unified voice for the industry** to represent their interests and to better liaise with government and community stakeholders.
- ▣ **Increased public recognition and awareness** of how nightlife positively contributes to the community.
- ▣ **Higher level of respect** and credibility as an industry.
- ▣ **Greater ability to self-police and self-regulate** the industry through peer-to-peer support and intervention.
- ▣ **Quick and efficient framework to mobilize business owners** around an urgent topic.
- ▣ **Set a new precedent for collaborating with legislators** to review and craft new public policy on nightlife prior to implementation, thereby avoiding public backlash and potential derailment.

### IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **Create a nightlife committee within the Downtown Macon Community Association to take advantage of the structure and staffing to initiate the group.**

- ▣ **Explore how to formally establish a hospitality alliance** for downtown restaurants, bars, nightclubs and music venues as a trade association or other entity.
- ▣ **Establish a regular meeting schedule.**
- ▣ **Formalize communication among two sub-groups:** business operators and security staff. Initiate regular meetings to exchange information and create a means for immediate communication while businesses are in operation (e.g. Facebook group, WhatsApp chat, text chain, etc.)
- ▣ **Investigate security training for security staff** in nightlife establishments. Due to the lack of statewide security mandates or licensing process for security, an outside expert may need to be brought into provide consistency of curriculum, which can be adopted for Downtown Macon establishments.

# 3 SCHEDULE FORUMS TO FACILITATE COMPLIANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT

## OVERVIEW

A collaborative team effort is required to keep social venues safe and in compliance. Beyond a “we tell you the rules and you follow them” approach, progressive cities with active social economies find that a more cooperative approach can achieve better long-term results. Instead of law enforcement and hospitality operators continuing to exist on “separate islands,” it’s time to bring them together, along with other safety stakeholders. Three key groups invested in the public safety of downtown Macon are: (1) the proposed Public Safety Team, (2) the proposed Hospitality and Nightlife Association, and finally, (3) BID safety ambassadors, a non-enforcement presence that contributes to a positive perception of safety.

## NEEDS STATEMENT

There is an atmosphere of distrust and resentment, with minimal communication or coordination between safety stakeholders and hospitality business operators.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- ❑ **Establish trust and open communication** between safety stakeholders and hospitality businesses.
- ❑ **Provide a means for** safety and hospitality stakeholders to be able to express concerns and voice requests directly to each other.
- ❑ **Facilitate information exchange** about upcoming special programs or events at nightlife venues to enable law enforcement to more effectively plan for additional staffing associated with expected crowd surges.
- ❑ **Develop a mutually agreed upon** strategy for public safety.

## IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **Identify representatives from the three groups – Public Safety Team, Hospitality and Nightlife Association and Safety Ambassadors to serve as a steering group.**

- ❑ **Establish regular meetings** between the three groups. Request that the county commission publicly endorse and advocate for these meetings. Identify a neutral location, a facilitator and documentation support staff.
- ❑ **Develop training and a voluntary guidelines document** for Public Safety in Macon’s Social Economy. Working together, a comprehensive public safety approach can be developed that may inform policies and training curriculum to reduce risk in the social economy.





# ENHANCE VIBRANCY

## CREATE A VISION FOR DAYLIFE AND NIGHTLIFE

### ENTERTAINMENT



Downtown Macon is a crown jewel of Central Georgia and the premier entertainment destination for the region. There are options for different markets such as cozy date spots, gamification and active

socializing, lounges and live music venues. While there are still market gaps that could bring a broader audience, downtown has a lot to offer. This information can be repackaged to attract new audiences for a curated night out appealing to different interests. Macon also has an opportunity to continue revitalizing its legacy as a music city.

### PUBLIC SPACE



Downtown truly comes alive during special events and festivals. Policy change for open-carry of alcohol downtown helped to bring the atmosphere of fun from First Friday to downtown everyday.

Participants expressed desire for more of an event atmosphere on non-event days, with street performance, vendors and food trucks. Caution is urged to coordinate activity so that it is organized and doesn't compete with existing businesses. Despite fears of taking away a limited pool of customers, such street activation can actually drive more foot traffic.

# CREATE A VISION FOR DAYLIFE AND NIGHTLIFE

## 1 >>> DOCUMENT MIX OF VENUES PROVIDING DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT

### OVERVIEW

Conduct an inventory of social venues that offer hospitality and socializing experiences, which can be used to market downtown. Information can be organized by different social experiences, interests and at different times of day. Ideally, a curated “night out downtown” can be crafted for different types of experiences e.g. date night, adventure on the town, girls’ night out, etc.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

Visitors and even residents may not be clear about the continuum of social offerings and activities available downtown at different times of day. Some of the current barriers include the following:

- ❑ **Typical marketing guides just provide a business listing**, rather than the different experiences offered at each venue.
- ❑ **Difficult to know which venues put on regular programming** e.g. live music, salsa night without a consolidated calendar.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- ❑ **Enhance marketing efforts** by providing visitors with more user-friendly suggestions on places to go based on the time frame and experience sought.
- ❑ **Drive tourism and economic development** in keeping with the 2015 Macon Action Plan’s (UDA, 2015) suggestion to “Explore opportunities to return to Macon’s roots with a renewed focus on the music industry, entertainment and tourism.”

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### ▶▶ Document the social experiences available at different social venues.

- ❑ **Engage diverse stakeholders** including the Hospitality Alliance (once formed), music venue representatives, as well as arts and culture representatives.
- ❑ **Survey residents and visitors** about the types of social experiences they are seeking.
- ❑ **Develop a guide online** and in app form.
- ❑ **Craft the different “curated social experiences” for the top 5 desired experiences** such as date night, girls’ night out, etc. Develop experiences within temporal boundaries (early night out, late nights,

## 2 >> ESTABLISH GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC SPACE, VENDORS, PERFORMERS

### OVERVIEW



There is an opportunity to capture the magic and excitement of event days and offer similar amenities downtown in strategic locations and times of day. There is a demand for vibrant public space activity (and some vendors e.g. food trucks operate illegally at night to meet the demand), but ideally, this activity would be planned and coordinated. Care will need to be taken to conscientiously clarify that such activities are intended to fill gaps and are not intended to conflict with existing brick-and-mortar businesses.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

Desire was expressed by numerous project participants for downtown to activate more of downtown's public space. This is particularly true during evening hours, when dead zones with low lighting and minimal foot traffic become a walkability barrier. However, there is confusion about whether it is legal to operate on non-event days.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- ❑ **Diversify late-night food options for visitors and residents** to meet consumer interest and demand for new and exciting food options, specifically, from food trucks.
- ❑ **Activate dark spaces** by driving foot traffic to vendors and performers.
- ❑ **Serve as a talent incubator for performers** such as the addition of Capricorn Studios.
- ❑ **Provide a low-barrier entry point for hospitality entrepreneurs**, who may eventually establish a brick-and-mortar business.

### IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **Establish a public space action team with representation of event planners, food truck and vendor representatives, public works, UDA representative, public health and parks management to establish guidelines for outdoor vendors, food trucks and street performers.**

- ❑ **Create a legal pathway to allow performers, food trucks and vendors** to operate with time, place and manner guidelines.
- ❑ **Determine permit cost and legal duration** of the permit.
- ❑ **Designate an office** to issue the permit.
- ❑ **Identify preliminary locations** so as not to compete with brick-and-mortar businesses. Some locations were suggested on the outskirts of downtown, including in the south side of downtown and nearby a closed historically black theater with grass and paved areas.

# 3

## SUPPORT PROCESS TO FORMALIZE MACON AS A MUSIC CITY

### OVERVIEW



Music cities embrace the economic and social benefits of a strategic approach to support a vibrant music ecosystem. Visit Macon is currently exploring the process of evaluating the city's status and potential for becoming a music city using the analysis framework outlined in Music Canada's *The Mastering of a Music City* report. There is an opportunity to promote the value of this undertaking.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

Macon has a historical legacy of being a music city, but it is not commonly recognized for its achievements. Supporting Visit Macon's process to receive formal recognition as a music city can open new opportunities for tourism and continued support of musicians and live music venues.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- ▣ **Achieve worldwide renown and recognition** as a music city and music-oriented branding ("Where Soul Lives"), driving tourism.
- ▣ **Create systems to better incubate local talent** and support venues where they perform and rehearse.

### IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **Support Visit Macon in convening a working group of music venue operators, musicians, educators, and music students to gather information and document the current status and potential of Macon as a music city.**

Use the Music Canada's comprehensive analysis in *The Mastering of a Music City* as a guide to evaluate Macon's status and potential as a music city. The following is a summary of seven criteria to evaluate. <https://musiccanada.com/resources/research/the-mastering-of-a-music-city/>

#### (1) Music-friendly and Musician-friendly Policies:

Government policies have a direct impact on the ability of music businesses such as live performance venues, recording studios and rehearsal spaces to operate sustainably. Successful Music Cities create a supportive environment for artists so that they can focus on doing what they do best: making music. Support can be in the form of training and education programs, mentoring, access to hubs or incubators and affordable housing.



(2) **A Music Office or Officer:** Cities that have established a single point of contact for the music community, in the form of a music office or officer, are better positioned to build their music economy and develop effective policies.

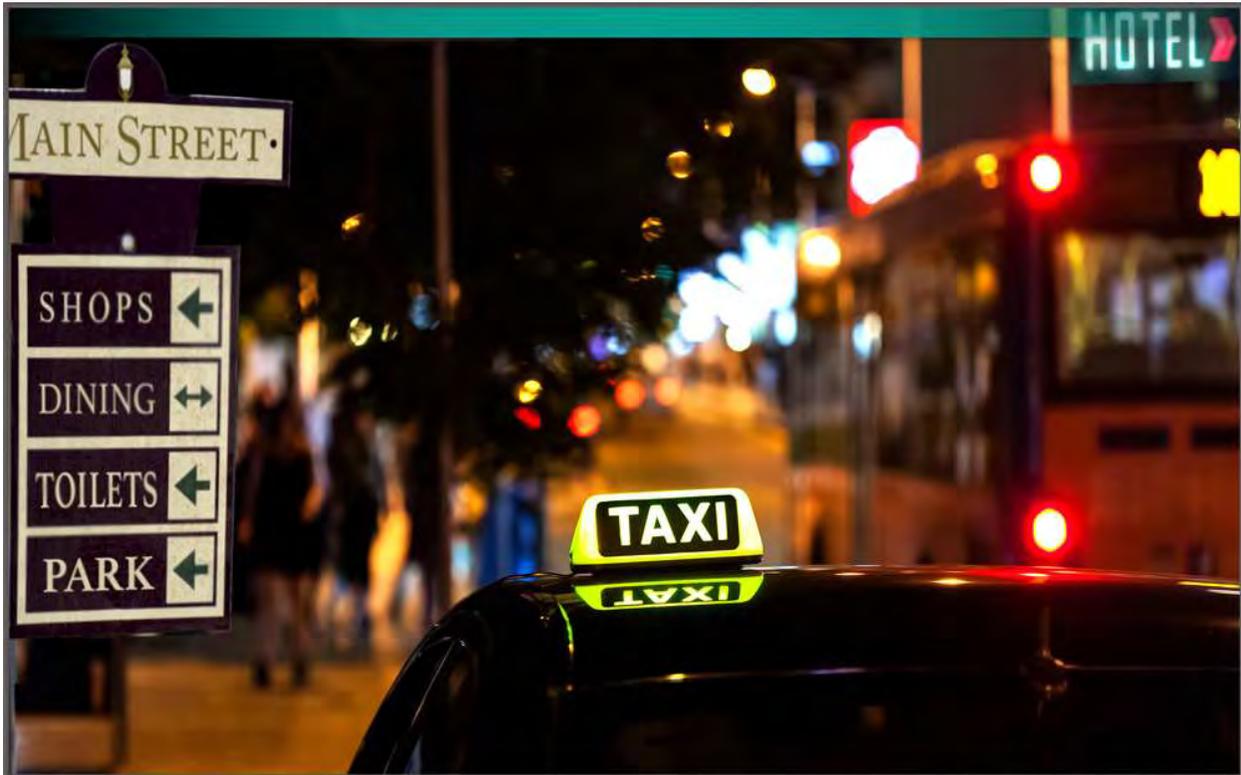
**(3) A Music Advisory Board:** Music Advisory Boards or Commissions provide an invaluable link between the music community and City Hall.

**(4) Engage the Broader Music Community to Get Their Buy-In and Support:** The involvement of the people most affected by music strategies is critical to the success of a Music City.

**(5) Access to Spaces and Places:** Music needs a home; in fact, it needs many homes. From education to rehearsal to recording to performance, Music Cities require a variety of quality spaces and places to succeed. To meet this need, the first step is to take inventory so that gaps can be identified.

**(6) Audience Development:** All-ages events can help engage younger audiences, thereby encouraging youth to develop a lifelong relationship with music. A common challenge is building an audience for local performers, who often fall under the shadow of high profile global stars.

**(7) Music Tourism:** Tourism assets include a city's year-round live music scene, music festivals and historical music landmarks.



# PLAN FOR PEOPLE

## PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AND ACCESSIBILITY

### QUALITY OF LIFE



Macon is a great place to live because of the social amenities offered by its downtown. Home to events, dining and nightlife, downtown is a center for community life. Macon’s journey of growth continues with new residential housing

and a planned hotel. Although the resident base is small, this will soon change. New systems—for sound mitigation, waste management, etc.—will be needed to ensure that currently high quality of life standards are maintained. Now is an excellent time to evaluate current procedures and put in place the systems that will ensure a high quality of life.

### MOBILITY



Downtown is very walkable during the day. Streets are clean and well-maintained with ample sidewalk space and “mini plazas” with potential for greater activation. Yet like in many downtowns, nighttime

walkability is hindered by gaps in lighting, signage, “eyes on the street” and existing sidewalk conditions in some areas. Identifying gaps in walkability will help expand safety perceptions of downtown and potential patronage of establishments in “dead zones.” Driving personal vehicles is still the primary way that many social economy patrons access social venues. Yet there may come a time for more coordinated plans involving personal vehicles and ride-hailing services.

# 1

## EVALUATE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ON THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

### OVERVIEW

Create an outreach process for nightlife/hospitality operators within Planning & Zoning and the Building Department. This process would be triggered whenever new residential or hotel developments are proposed for downtown (prior to construction). The best-case scenario would be in-person meetings hosted by the project developer to discuss upcoming projects with nearby business operators.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

Conflicts often arise in downtowns when a mix of uses is developed in close proximity without mitigating measures to ensure peaceful coexistence (i.e. sound complaints, trash management, crowds, etc.). This is particularly true when new residences or hotel developments are built next to existing social venues that operate primarily at night (or vice versa).

The long-term success of development in mixed-use downtown districts requires an inclusive community engagement and outreach process. While planners consider the compatibility of uses, they don't always consider those uses' hours of operation. But nightlife and sleeping aren't necessarily "good bedfellows." Some uses have innate conflicts because of operational hours.

RHI has identified the following gaps in procedures:

- ❑ In the Design Review Board meeting, developers will have already invested a significant amount of money and may push back against proposed changes late in the process (hence the need for outreach/engagement PRIOR to the public hearing stage).
- ❑ Inadequate outreach and notification process (e.g. via direct mail or electronically) to find out about public hearings on new developments. Community members (residents and business owners alike) don't find out about projects until they've already broken ground. This is especially true for hospitality business operators, who work at night, and may not notice a posting on the wall. Or, hospitality businesses and community members don't know how to opt in (or why it's important to do so).
- ❑ No central webpage for proposed projects until they go on the agenda for P&Z commission.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- ❑ **Long-term success of development** in a mixed-use downtown environment.
- ❑ **Create systems for peaceful coexistence of** residents and commercial businesses.
- ❑ **Reduce anticipated quality of life (especially sound) challenges** associated with nightlife venues being in proximity to hotels and residences.

## BACKGROUND

### Current Process:

1. Pre-Development meeting is held between a developer and Planning & Zoning Commission staff and other departments to provide preliminary feedback on a proposal.
2. Design Review Board (DRB) meeting takes place.
3. Public hearing at the P&Z Commission is held.
4. County commission provides final approval.

## IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **Develop a multi-modal system for notification, communication and engagement for development projects.**

- ☐ **Create an electronic notification system** either via email or text message (with sign-ups) for what projects are proposed for development downtown.
- ☐ **Create a central announcement webpage** for new and proposed projects.
- ☐ **Identify an entity or organization** to be in charge of initiating notifications.
- ☐ **Engage law enforcement as applications for new developments are received** so they can provide input on new residential and hotel developments earlier in the process.
- ☐ **Best-case scenario:** In-person meetings hosted by the project developer to discuss upcoming projects.

## RESOURCES

- ☐ **Historic Macon's neighborhood leadership program** with representatives of various neighborhoods.
- ☐ **E-mail list:** Emily Hopkin's list.
- ☐ **Nextdoor** (app).

# 2

## IDENTIFY UNDER-UTILIZED "DEAD ZONES" FOR IMPROVEMENT

### OVERVIEW

Address walkability “dead zones” for pedestrians downtown at night improve customers’ perception of safety. Environmental cues can help contribute to a more positive perception of safety.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

Negative perceptions of safety at night are reinforced by various environmental cues such as storefront vacancies and dim lighting on streets, alleys and in parking structures. Dim lighting is a particular concern for safety of employees who work at night and who may be carrying cash tips. Specific challenges and barriers include the following:

- ❑ **Unclear what authority would be in charge of fixing lighting in 4 areas:** sidewalks, vacant properties, parking structures, and alleys.
- ❑ **No system for lodging complaints with the proper authority** (due to lack of awareness about who the authority is). Thus, no opportunity for follow-through to ensure implementation of requests.
- ❑ **Property owners aren’t currently required to light up vacant** or occupied properties (unless it’s a new development).
- ❑ **Media sensationalizes public safety incidents** downtown, which impacts day and night patronage.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- ❑ Improve perception of safety downtown by addressing environmental cues.

### IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **Compile information on “dead zones” by convening small walking groups with women and crowdsource information for online contributions.**

- ❑ **Document and inventory** the “dead zone” locations and reasons (e.g. street lighting, dim storefronts, etc.).
- ❑ **Identify who’s in charge** of each source of dim lighting.
- ❑ **Clarify (or develop a system) for lodging complaints** about inadequate lighting to notify the appropriate authority.

### RESOURCES

- ❑ Planning & Zoning Commission can require new developments to have lighting at night (e.g. condition of approval).

# 3

## DEVELOP SOUND MANAGEMENT POLICY AND MEDIATION STRATEGY

### OVERVIEW

Successful nightlife requires an effective sound ordinance and mechanisms for addressing complaints in a timely way. Now is the time to create a robust plan for both monitoring compliance and enforcing violations.

### NEEDS STATEMENT

There are several gaps in the sound management continuum that are inhibiting successful sound mitigation. The sound ordinance needs review and updates to reflect a contemporary mixed-use environment. The Sheriff's office is the designated enforcement agency for sound complaints. Already short-staffed, the sheriff's office prioritizes response to urgent public safety calls for service rather than nuisance abatement.

Cities with active social economies often designate an alternate authority (other than police) to address sound. RHI outlines the three most common departments that other cities authorize to address sound, and their current relationship with sound in Macon-Bibb County:

- ☐ **Code Enforcement:** Will soon be moved under the Fire Department. The division doesn't currently handle sound complaints.
- ☐ **Planning and Zoning** has inspectors, but currently doesn't conduct after-hours checks.
- ☐ **Health department** currently doesn't address sound.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Ensure the long-term success and coexistence of downtown's diverse activity by proactively creating systems for anticipated sound challenges.

### IMPLEMENTATION

▶▶ **Move forward with updates to the ordinance, documentation procedures and an exploration of the appropriate entity to be in charge of sound mitigation associated with the social economy.**

- ☐ **Separate out reporting (i.e. 311 system) of sound complaints** with a designated non-emergency line so people don't use the 911 dispatch system.
- ☐ **Update sound ordinance.**
  - Update the ordinance to reduce subjectivity and create consistent guidelines for monitoring and definitions of a violation.
- ☐ **Empower an alternative department to the police** for sound complaint inspections and enforcement. Given law enforcement's steady decline of resources, many cities are removing duties from the police. Many cities (e.g. Toronto, Sacramento) consider code compliance a more effective department to be in charge of sound mitigation.
- ☐ **Implement new design measures and sound mitigation strategies** for the new hotel development approved in July 2020 in the CBD in proximity to nightlife businesses.
- ☐ **Conduct a sound study** with an acoustical engineer.



# **STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES**

# SECTION 1: LAY A FOUNDATION FOR A SOCIABLE CITY

## Overview

No community’s government is perfect. There are usually departments or agencies that are perceived as inefficient or difficult to work with, while others are praised for their customer service and convenience. Depending on their touch points with hospitality business operators, this may affect the social economy in a variety of ways.

In Macon-Bibb County, the most controversial county department is Business Development Services (BDS). Initially conceived as a “one stop shop” shortly after county consolidation, there are some who believe it was not properly resourced or organized. Through a series of stakeholder interviews, RHI uncovered that BDS is being reimagined, with some divisions to be absorbed into new locations. The latest update (as of Jan 2021) is for BDS to be renamed Department of Code Enforcement. The business and alcohol licensing functions have already been transitioned into the county’s most praised and (per anecdotal reports) most well-run department, the Tax Commissioner’s Office.

As part of this project, RHI staff mapped out the process of obtaining and renewing an alcohol license to identify “pain points” and areas for improvement. In July and August 2020, RHI staff actively coordinated with the staff person in charge of the licensing transition (Tanja Battle, Deputy Tax Commissioner, Tax Commissioner’s Office) to relay feedback to her. She initiated contact with State Department of Revenue to propose recommended changes recommended.

## Foundation Snapshot: Strengths vs. Challenges

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Local alcohol license process currently being streamlined</b> and digitized due to the transition of license authority from Business Development Services to the Tax Commissioner’s Office.</li> <li>▣ <b>Business Development Services is undergoing a significant organizational change</b> that may result in greater efficiencies and better customer service for business applicants and owners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Inability to access or compile occupancy records</b> for businesses downtown (likely due to files not being digitized).</li> <li>▣ <b>Current local alcohol license process is cumbersome</b> and inefficient due to limited digitization, transparency and clear instructions.</li> <li>▣ <b>Limited cross-education among agencies</b> about each other’s roles and alcohol licensing process.</li> <li>▣ <b>Gap in notifications to sheriff’s office</b> about new social venues located outside of downtown.</li> </ul>

# Foundation Strengths

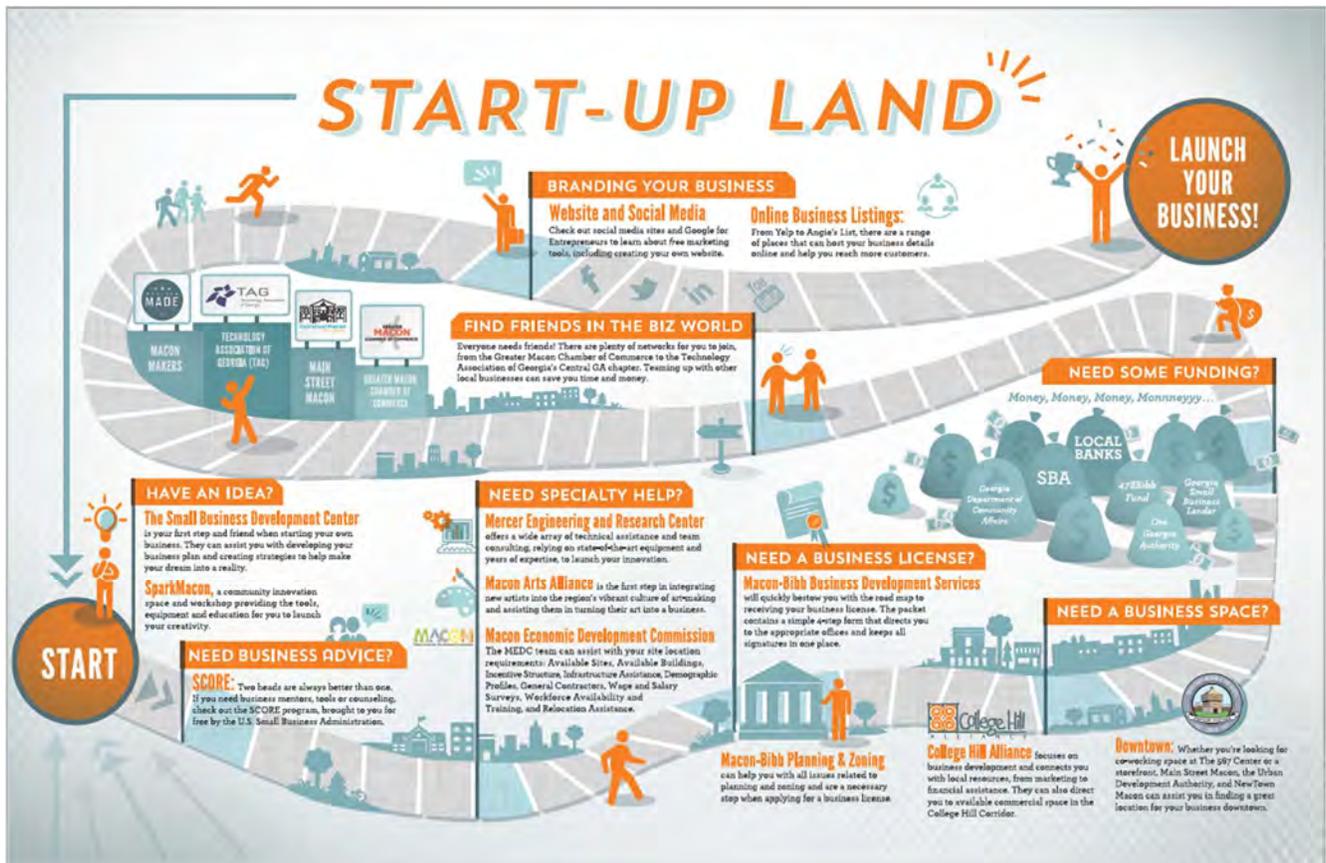
## Transition to Tax Commissioner’s Office

The Tax Commissioner’s office is anecdotally referred to as one of the best-run departments in the county. They have a ticket system, kiosks, minimal waiting time, and plexiglass shields to protect the public health of staff and customers. There are green, yellow and red rating buttons where the tax commissioner himself will meet with customers if they provide an unsatisfactory review.

The transition from Business Development Services to the Tax Commissioner’s office for both local business licenses and local alcohol licenses could signal a new opportunity for improved customer service with hospitality business operators and the benefit of a streamlined process. (Previously, the only touch point for hospitality businesses with this office was to pay property taxes.)

## Existing Guide for Opening a Business

“Start-Up Land” graphic created and designed by College Hill Alliance in 2015. Updating this type of graphic would be an excellent resource for new business applicants.



Graphic courtesy of College Hill Alliance, 2015.

# Foundation Challenges



## Inability to Access Occupancy Data

A request to Business Development Services to provide information about occupancy of businesses downtown was met with the following response: “this information was not captured by staff previously for Certificates of Occupancy issued through this office.”

This made it difficult to define occupancy requirements during COVID restrictions.

## Zoning

Gap in local zoning requirements to regulate distance of nightlife venues from churches. This has led to disputes between bar owners and church leaders. Nightlife venues only have to abide by distance requirements regarding proximity to schools.

## Musicians and Fire Department

Project participants report that artists and musicians have relayed frustration about the difficulty in working with the fire department. Some attribute this difficulty to the decision not to return to Macon to perform.

## Development Impediments

Building Development Services outsources the review of new development plans, which slows down the process. It also generates unnecessarily costly and cumbersome plan requirements. Stakeholders from building owners, tenants, developers and architects have expressed frustration with the current system. There has not been consistency in management personnel at BDS, which may be a symptom or a cause of reported dysfunctionality.

## Notification to Sheriff’s Office of New Licenses

Some nightclubs open on the outskirts of the county; they may not be on the inspections list for the sheriff, but then it gets on the radar if an incident occurs.

## Misunderstanding Gap in Cross-Education re: Alcohol licensing process

Gaps in understanding about the city and state alcohol license process was identified during stakeholder interviews.

## Change in Department Organization

### Business Development Services

Business Development Services (BDS) was reportedly intended to serve as a one-stop-shop to facilitate efficiency after the city and county consolidation. However, the department struggled with inconsistent leadership, connectivity between the three divisions, and sufficient staff resources.

Reported challenges with this department include:

- Poor customer service in person and remotely. Long wait times.
- Understaffed and underfunded.
- Forms posted online are outdated. The website is updated with current versions when requested.

### Future of the Department

Previously composed of three distinct divisions (building permits, licensing and code enforcement), below is RHI’s understanding of the plan for each division.

DIVISION	TRANSITION PLAN
Licensing (business licenses and local alcohol licenses)	Absorbed into the Tax Commissioner’s Office.
Code Enforcement	The original plan was for Code Enforcement to be absorbed into the Fire Department (all municipal code enforcement, not just fire code), under a new department called “Community Risk Reduction Division.” The current plan is to rename the remainder of BDS as Code Enforcement. <i>RHI suggests a name change to “Code Compliance.”</i>
Building Permits (Macon-Bibb County Building Department)	Will continue to be handled by the 3 <sup>rd</sup> party private organization, SAFEbuilt, which will be housed under the Community Risk reduction Division. SAFEbuilt has a 5-year contract with the county. Note: The only touch point for hospitality businesses will be if they have to update their physical building e.g. remodel.

### New Organization of Departments and Divisions:

- ☐ **Who SafeBuilt will report to:** For day-to-day operations, SafeBuilt will report to the fire department. But the primary authority that Safe Built reports to is County Manager Keith Moffett.
- ☐ **SafeBuilt is still waiting** for the fire department to create the division (as of late 2020).

## Licensing Process Overview

### Business and Alcohol Licensing Process for On-Premise Businesses

RHI staff documented the following process for obtaining a business and alcohol license.

1. Business applicants constructs their venue.
2. (New businesses) **apply for a certificate of occupancy.**
3. **Apply for a business license from Business Development Services.** That gets mailed to Central Records – they set up appointment for getting fingerprints. Once that is approved, move on to the next step.
4. **Apply for a local alcohol license from Business Development Services.** (Though it’s referred to locally as a “license,” and it is on paper, it’s really just an authorization to move the process forward to the state.). (TIMING: It can take 6-8 weeks to get the local authorization approved.) To get approval:
  - a. **Pay Business Development Services for the processing fee** to get fingerprints done. Business Development Services notifies sheriff’s office so an appointment can be set up.
  - b. **Go to the sheriff’s office so they can run a background check** through Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) and get fingerprinted.
    - i. The sheriff’s office then mails the results to Business Development Services. (According to Business Development Services, they actually pick them up from the sheriff’s office to avoid mail delays).
5. **If the applicant passes the background check,** move on to the next step.
6. **Business Development Services prepares for the county commissioners’ meeting.** It goes to the legal department if it’s new.
  - a. It has to go on the agenda for the county commissioners’ meeting. They only meet the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month.
  - b. The applicant’s name is put in the paper for a minimum of 2 weeks to allow the public to object to the request for an alcohol license.
  - c. Once approved by commissioner’s office and signed off by the mayor, it’s then delivered back to Business Development Services.
  - d. Business Development Services issues the local alcohol license.
7. Once a business applicant receives the local authorization for an alcohol license, they can **apply for a state alcohol license.** Turnaround time is approximately 8 weeks.
  - a. While waiting for the state alcohol license to be approved, the business can serve alcohol provisionally if they:
    - i. Apply for a provisional (temporary) alcohol license for a fixed-place establishment. Note: this is the more ideal approach per RHI staff.
    - ii. Apply for a special event license (using a catering license). Note: this is an inelegant work-around.

## **Renewal of Alcohol Licenses**

### **City Process**

There is an annual renewal of the city alcohol license. In the year 2020, it switched from a January 1<sup>st</sup> renewal date to Sept 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Renewal locally is more complicated than the state's process. The mayor signs the renewal. It would be ideal for the process to be clearer, more transparent and more intuitive.

### **State Process**

The state has an annual renewal (easy system where you make updates if contact info/ mailing address has changed.)

### **License Conditions**

#### **Business Licensing Procedures**

Ordinance language is written so that the county sheriff reviews and approves of bar and nightclubs' business license applications and renewals. The sheriff's department can put conditions on the license, such as requiring security cameras, determining staffing levels, lighting, operational hours, etc. Conditional uses require a public hearing and review by the Planning Commission.

However, precedent has not been set for the sheriff to put conditions on licenses.

#### **Alcohol Licenses**

In general, the sheriff doesn't put conditions on the local alcohol license; instead, the state puts conditions. The state license-issuing body and enforcement agent is the Department of Revenue.

## Challenges and Suggested Improvements to the License Process

RHI documented and conveyed the following challenges and suggested improvements to the Deputy Tax Commissioner after her hiring when she was dedicated to streamlining the process.

CHALLENGE	IMPROVEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Prevalent use of hard-copy files</b> that have to be mailed or physically delivered/picked up from various departments for handwritten signatures. Documents sometimes get lost in the mail or delayed in transit. Status of applications is difficult to ascertain due to the lack of online status updates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Switch to an electronic licensing system</b> that provides a dashboard where files can be accessed and approved digitally. This will streamline review systems for various divisions and provides applicants with a clearer, more transparent update on status. It would also be safer for public health to switch to a contactless approach.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Inconsistent data entry</b> of information such as addresses (mailing address vs. physical address).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Confirm and update information</b> during renewal processes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Key information</b> not available on the website, forcing applicants to call to access the form and find out the required information to submit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Create an information sheet listing all required</b> information for submission, with links to all current forms. The goal is to provide instructions on the front-end to reduce phone inquiries.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Delay in sheriff’s office notifying Business Development Services</b> of results from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI)’s fingerprinting/background check. Results are usually ready in 24-48 hours, yet it takes two weeks for the results to be mailed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Switch to an online GBI system.</b> Note: It will still be important for the sheriff’s office to have a touch point during the process so they have to give approval or suggested denial of the business license for consideration by the commissioners.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Delay in turnaround time for the state alcohol license.</b> Current workaround (not ideal) is to apply for a special event license using a catering license.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Identify reasons for the delay</b> from the state agency.</li> <li>▣ <b>Promote greater use of the new provisional (temporary) alcohol license</b> for a fixed-place establishment.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Gaps in communication between state Department of Revenue</b> and cities/counties to relay to cities/counties that a business has been issued a state alcohol license. Difficulty for the city/county to check and see if a business in fact has their state alcohol license or that it is active vs. revoked.</li> <li>▣ <b>Gaps during renewal process or change of agent</b> (i.e. manager) where the business might be missing the state alcohol license or vice versa. For example: they had the state license, but the updated local license was still being processed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Facilitate better communication</b> between state alcohol license issuing organization (Dept of Revenue) and the Tax Commissioner’s office.</li> <li>▣ <b>Streamline process.</b> Should be improved so it’s just “select this option if you didn’t move and you have the same address.”) As long as there are no violations on file, the renewal process should be quick and efficient.</li> <li>▣ Note: During the pandemic, some cities’ nightlife advocates are pushing for an auto-renewal of alcohol licenses with deferred payment.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>No occupancy data</b> captured in a digital format in the alcohol license process. (Due to lack of digitization of files by BDS, information is not accessible when requested for individual businesses or in aggregate form).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Integrate occupancy data</b> into the new alcohol license application and/or renewal process to ensure a copy is digitized and kept on file.</li> </ul>

## SECTION 2: PUBLIC SAFETY



Public safety in the nighttime economy requires an interagency collaboration to identify risks and coordinate intervention and education with the objective of improving compliance by nightlife venues and efficiently responding to nighttime incidents.

### Overview

The most detrimental gap in Macon’s journey to becoming a safer, vibrant social economy is the lack of a coordinated public safety strategy for downtown, particularly at night. There is a renewed commitment to public safety after the November 27, 2020 shooting outside a nightclub. The primary law enforcement entity is the Macon-Bibb Sheriff’s Office, yet the office faces resource limitations and an officer shortage. In the most ideal of situations, a sufficient number of officers would be trained, scheduled and deployed per the ideal guidelines of nightlife district law enforcement officers as outlined in RHI’s *Public Safety and Policing Nightlife Districts* guide. Yet police should not be the only public safety resource at night. Sheriff’s officers should be just one partner in a broader continuum employing other agencies (including fire, Georgia Department of Revenue’s Alcohol & Tobacco division, health, code compliance) and in partnership with private security (e.g. BID district ambassadors, venue-hired door security).

The late 2020 shooting outside a nightclub revealed that the fear sparked by an incident that takes place at night is not contained at night; in fact, daytime businesses are also affected by fears of public safety. For downtown to succeed, it needs to be recognized as an economic generator, especially by county government agencies, that depend on tax revenue from downtown businesses. If county leaders are truly committed to creating an effective public safety approach, an overhaul is needed to reimagine the role of public safety. The status quo is no longer acceptable.

### Public Safety Snapshot: Strengths vs. Challenges

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Commitment by law enforcement to the vision</b> of a safe, thriving downtown.</li> <li>❑ <b>Alcohol license renewal</b> is an intervention point for sheriff’s office.</li> <li>❑ <b>Two deputies consistently deployed</b> downtown Sun, Mon, Wed-Fri</li> <li>❑ <b>Positive precedent set prior to county consolidation:</b> Used to have 4 sheriff’s officers deployed downtown walking the beat.</li> <li>❑ <b>BID Safety Ambassadors</b> provide nighttime presence/visibility.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Sheriff’s office empowered</b> to enforce state health dept rules.</li> <li>❑ <b>Sheriff’s office issued citations</b> during the lockdown period when bars and restaurants were not allowed to operate.</li> <li>❑ <b>GA State Patrol has proven effective in enforcement of health rules</b> when requested to intervene w/ businesses by health dept.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Insufficient staff resources</b> at sheriff’s office.</li> <li>❑ <b>Only one deputy deployed downtown on Tues &amp; Sat</b>, making it an officer safety issue for conflict intervention.</li> <li>❑ <b>Slow response time by sheriffs</b> when a call for service is placed.</li> <li>❑ <b>Reactive (complaint driven) rather than proactive deployment</b> i.e. not enough resources to spot-check venues.</li> <li>❑ <b>Negative perceptions of safety downtown</b> by some residents, businesses.</li> <li>❑ <b>2-4am peak time for safety issues</b> downtown</li> <li>❑ <b>Limited use of security cameras</b> in the district</li> <li>❑ <b>No regular communication forum</b> between government agencies on nightlife businesses.</li> <li>❑ <b>Bars allowed to hire overtime or off-duty officers</b> from sheriff’s office (potential conflict of interest).</li> <li>❑ <b>Lack of awareness among gov’t officials</b>, business owners re: a set closing time after alcohol service must end at 2:00 a.m.</li> <li>❑ <b>Some patrons BYOB to bars</b> between 2-4am, but violations hard to prove.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Gap in proactive monitoring</b>, enforcement of health rules in legally reopened bars, restaurants. (GA State Patrol handles this instead of Sheriff’s office when requested by health dept.)</li> <li>❑ <b>Emerging safety challenges</b> w/ attempted robbery.</li> </ul>

# Public Safety Strengths

## Commitment to the Vision of a Safe, Thriving Downtown

Representatives of the Macon-Bibb Sheriffs office expressed the desire to continue to see downtown thrive and keep it safe.

## Intervention Point at Renewal of Alcohol License

During the alcohol license renewal process, sheriff’s office staff can identify challenges with a venue and suggest denying renewal depending on the frequency and severity of violations.

## BID Safety Ambassadors

Safety ambassadors “in orange jackets” are hired by NewTown Macon to patrol Thursday-Saturday from 8:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. A women’s focus group identified their presence as an asset and something that makes them feel safe at night, especially when walking past groups of men or people experiencing homelessness.

Currently (during COVID): there are 6 ambassadors, including the Operations Manager. The clean team covers 7:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m. Monday-Friday. On Thursday-Saturday, safety ambassadors are deployed during the hours of 8:00 or 9:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. Note: due to COVID-19, the evening hours fluctuate depending on social venue activity/ operating restrictions.



# Public Safety Challenges

## Insufficient Safety Resources

There is a mismatch in the level of nighttime social activity and public safety resources for monitoring and enforcement services. When Macon’s police department consolidated into a county sheriff’s office, it “doubled the territory but lost officers.”

Sheriff’s office has insufficient resources to provide coverage for an active downtown at night. Prior to consolidation, four officers were deployed downtown for proactive patrolling on foot, yet now only two (a sergeant and a corporal) consistently patrol (except for Tuesdays and Saturdays, when only one officer is on duty). The lack of staffing is a safety risk not only for nighttime patrons, but also for officers if they must intervene in a fight. Morale appears to be low, as sheriff’s officers try to make the best out of a difficult situation while facing public criticism.

### Why the lack of officers?

Per the sheriff’s office, it is difficult to hire officers with current pay and benefits. It is also a long process to get officers trained and on the ground.

### Slow Response Time by Sheriff’s Officers

Venue operators report a delay of 20-30 minutes between when venues call for help and when authorities arrive. By the time officers arrives, venue staff have, in some cases, been forced to address the issue themselves, or the problem has escalated. Sheriff’s office confirms that if the officers originally deployed downtown were redeployed to a different district, then other officers have to be requested from a different district.

## Safety Issues Peak 2:00-4:00 a.m.

Typical nightlife safety issues include unruly behavior, public intoxication, fights when people leave venues, and destruction of property (e.g. throwing tables through windows).

Notably, at 2:45 a.m. on Nov 27, 2020, there was a shooting outside a nightclub that resulted in one death and several injured. This incident provoked renewed commitment to increase public safety associated with nightlife, however the specific outcomes (deployment strategy, resource increase, training, etc.) is still unclear (as of January 2021).

Further, sheriff’s office has found it difficult to prove violations of the end of alcohol service past 2:00 a.m., when patrons are allowed to remain on-premise. Some bring their own alcohol.

### Reactive rather than Proactive Deployment

There is reportedly more of a culture of shutting down at-risk businesses rather than issuing fines, warnings or educational interventions. Fire marshal and sheriff jointly address at-risk nightlife venues, but in response to ongoing or egregious safety issues. The lack of overall resources is likely perpetuating a more reactive than proactive model. In the past, police were able to proactively patrol on foot and on segways, providing a visible deterrent for public safety.

# Public Safety Challenges Continued

## Negative Perceptions of Safety

Downtown still has a negative reputation for safety. This is fueled by media reports about an incident happening “downtown,” yet the street address may not technically be within the central business district’s boundaries.

## Code Compliance Resources Limited

Business services department’s code compliance team is reportedly operating with minimal staff and resources. (In other cities, code compliance tends to be an alternate law enforcement agency to police that handles issues related to the social economy at night.)

## Occupancy Data Unavailable

A Planning and Zoning Commission representative, at RHI’s request, initiated an inter-departmental information request to Business Development Services (BDS) to provide information about downtown businesses’ occupancy. The response received from BDS stated, “this information was not captured by staff previously for Certificates of Occupancy issued through this office.” The lack of information makes it impossible for law enforcement to ascertain whether a venue is operating within occupancy limits.



## Communication during License Revocation Process

When a state revokes an alcohol license, there is no direct communication with local authorities to revoke the local business license. (It is found out about “through the grapevine.”) It would be unusual for a local license to be revoked prior to the state’s license.

## Overtime or Off-Duty Sheriff’s Officers Can be Hired by Bars

Sheriff’s office allows bars to hire and directly pay overtime officers. For officer safety, there is a requirement that when a venue hires overtime officers, they must hire two officers per establishment. Business operators have also been encouraged to hire off-duty officers for a faster response time to public safety incidents. Only a few businesses engage in this practice (and less since COVID-19), but it can be a potential conflict of interest. (Many major cities such as NYC, Chicago and Milwaukee prohibit social venues that serve alcohol to hire police or sheriff’s dept officers due to the potential conflict of interest. Direct payment in cash is of particular concern.)



# Public Safety Challenges COVID-19

## No Extra Resources Dedicated for Enforcement of Health Rules

When GA state governor Brian Kemp authorized reopening of restaurants, then later, bars and nightclubs, no additional resources were dedicated to enforcement of public health guidelines in local municipalities. While the sheriff's office was technically empowered to enforce health guidelines, the office was already operating with insufficient staffing. The county health department did not have a field team of inspectors. The result was hospitality venues operating without much oversight.

The Sheriff's office did enforce businesses operating in violation of the initial lockdown rules, where bars and restaurants were prohibited from operating.

## Inability to Enforce Occupancy Limits Due to Lack of Data

The inability to ascertain the legal occupancy per Certificates of Occupancy issued by Business Development Services made it impossible for the sheriff's office (or any other law enforcement agency) to determine if a business was in legal compliance with reduced occupancy rules during COVID-19.

Sheriff's office didn't have sufficient resources for spot-checking, even if they did have this information. Some business owners took advantage of the situation and operated out of compliance with the state's reopening guidelines.

## Health Citation Procedures

A business owner must be issued two warnings before a citation can be issued. Health department has instead relied upon the GA state patrol for quicker response.



*Photos courtesy of NewTown Macon*

# Public Safety | Gender Perspective

*Based on a women's focus group held in February 2020.*

The physical environment of a downtown social district has a large impact on whether women feel safe at night. Environmental cues such as good lighting, cleanliness and presence of uniformed ambassadors contribute to a positive perception of safety. However, participants commented that they intentionally avoid areas that are consistently dark, even if it means they don't patronize social venues they would otherwise be interested in. Groups of men catcalling or stationed in alleyways contribute to negative perceptions of safety, as well as suspicious individuals who aren't the "regulars" who are deemed safe. Environmental cues such as dim lighting and the smell of public urination contribute to a perception that an area is uncared for or unmonitored.

## The Physical Environment of a Social District

### What makes women feel safe and comfortable?

- ▣ Well-lit alleyways.
- ▣ Art walks.
- ▣ Clean; no litter or cigarette butts.
- ▣ BID's night security ambassadors in orange jackets.

### What makes women feel unsafe and uncomfortable?

- ▣ Dark, dimly lit areas.
- ▣ Dead zone on Cherry Street from 3<sup>rd</sup> to MLK (don't go to venues along that route).
- ▣ Paths to certain venues (Cashmans, Piano bar, Late Night) are dark.
- ▣ Storefront vacancies
- ▣ Groups of men catcalling.
- ▣ Men stationed in alleys or on streets, forcing you to move into more dimly lit areas to avoid them.
- ▣ Public urination in alleys.
- ▣ Stories of muggings.
- ▣ New homeless people who you don't know.
- ▣ Proselytizers.

### Ideas

- ▣ Door-to-door shuttle to venues (e.g. Cherry from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>)



## SECTION 3: VENUE SAFETY



Venue safety is comprised of the initiatives that venue operators and event organizers undertake to protect the health and safety of their patrons and staff at night. An important part of venue safety is to collaborate with regulatory and enforcement agencies to increase industry safety and compliance.

### Overview

Macon has a notably high level of engagement of social venue owners and operators. Their venues provide places for people to connect and socialize, something sorely missed throughout the country during the pandemic. They are also a “second home” and community for staff who work at these venues. There is a high level of participation and engagement by downtown hospitality business operators and staff, many of whom own multiple venues and have long family histories in Macon. They are invested in their communities, yet many feel disillusioned and powerless about things they cannot change—such as the void in public safety oversight. What is not being realized is that they as a collective whole represent a potentially powerful alliance of business leaders who can embody the change they want to see. While hardest hit by pandemic-era restrictions on capacity, group size, etc. the hospitality industry is also known for its ability to adapt quickly and pivot to a “new reality.” There is an opportunity for hospitality venues in Macon to formally organize and advocate for changes to enhance the social experience their venues provide.

### Venue Safety Snapshot: Strengths vs. Challenges

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ High level participation by hospitality operators in Downtown Macon Community Association meetings.</li> <li>▣ Proactive initiatives by owners and staff to ensure the safety of their patrons.</li> <li>▣ Greater sense of self-governance and compliance (out of necessity) b/c of the gap in safety resources.</li> <li>▣ Safe, female-friendly bathrooms in some establishments.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ “Macon It Safe” pledge for businesses participating in public health and safety standards. #MaconItSafe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ Void of hospitality association.</li> <li>▣ No organized guide for how to open or operate a nightlife business.</li> <li>▣ No nightlife-specific training or background check requirements for unarmed security guards hired individually.</li> <li>▣ No communication system between venue security from multiple venues.</li> <li>▣ Potential access to alcohol by minors at events for 18-20-year-old adults.</li> <li>▣ Alcohol handler’s permit doesn’t include servers and waitstaff who bring beverages to customers.</li> <li>▣ Confusion around closing time for on-sale alcohol licensees: Last alcohol sales is 2:00 a.m. and business closure is 3:00 a.m. on all days but Sunday.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ Uneven venue compliance upon reopening.</li> <li>▣ New health rules increase business costs (e.g. dedicated staff for cleaning).</li> <li>▣ Conflict resolution with patrons who oppose public health guidelines.</li> <li>▣ Multiple openings and temporary closings of businesses due to staff testing positive for COVID-19.</li> </ul>

# Venue Safety Strengths

Photos courtesy of Late Night, Niche and Dovetail



## Hospitality Venue Network

Hospitality business operators attend meetings and have created their own informal networking groups:

### Downtown Macon Community Association Meetings

Daytime and nighttime social businesses participate in monthly meetings held the first Tuesday of the month at 9:00 a.m. at the NewTown Macon office. These meetings have a “110% positivity policy” and are attended by residents, businesses and political candidates.

### Wednesday Restaurateur Meetings

A group of restaurateurs have been informally meeting on a weekly basis since before COVID-19’s arrival and especially during the pandemic. There is interest in expanding attendees to bar and club owners. There is potential for this group to become a powerful voice to advocate for change.

### Proactive Initiatives by Staff

Numerous examples have been cited of security staff being proactive to ensure the safety of patrons, especially female patrons, to make sure they return to their cars safely after closing time.

### Bathrooms

A few stellar examples of female-friendly restrooms with amenities such as seating, art displays, multiple purse hooks and selfie lighting. One particular venue even has the venue’s logo backwards, so it gets featured when women take bathroom selfies (excellent marketing).

### Small, Intimate Lounge-like Spaces Preferred by Women

While many social venues that operate at night are identified as sports-oriented bars, there are a few notable exceptions where women feel most comfortable e.g. small, intimate lounge spaces with appetizer plates.

# Venue Safety Strengths | COVID-19

## Guidance from Public Health Dept

Business operators interviewed expressed positive feedback about the guidance given by the local health department, which posted examples of signage and regularly updated their webpage with resources. However, this guidance was reportedly not particularly helpful for bars and clubs.

## Guidance from Georgia Restaurant Association

Although maintaining only a minimal presence in Macon, representation is increasing. They also provided guidance to restaurateurs.

## Proactive Public Health Measures

Many businesses have redesigned their spaces to ensure physical distancing. There are numerous examples of how they have also gone above and beyond to create a variety of measures to ensure customers' public health and to restore consumer confidence:

- ▣ Some businesses closed indoor dining rooms prior to the state mandate.
- ▣ Table tents placed on tables to inform guests that the table has been disinfected. (That way customers don't accidentally sit down at a table that hasn't yet been cleaned).
- ▣ 1 business has notably required temperature checks and face coverings/masks when patrons enter a building, when seated, when not drinking or eating, and when staff waits on them.
- ▣ Arrows on the ground for directional signage to entrances, exits and restrooms to facilitate one-way traffic.

## Lack of Health Complaints

As of July 13, 2020, health department staff were not aware of any health-related complaints (related to physical distancing) against downtown Macon businesses. This is more likely a reflection of the public's prevalent lack of concern over health guidelines rather than 100% compliance by businesses, however.



## Consistent Patronage, though Reduced

According to interviews, people continue to patronize downtown Macon businesses late at night, but activity is slightly

reduced.

## Macon It Safe Pledge

"*Macon It Safe* is a county-wide campaign starting September 14, 2020 for Macon-Bibb workplaces, businesses, and organizations to protect the health and well-being of our community by following COVID-19 safety guidelines, encouraging employees and customers to wear masks, and promoting social distancing." (Macon It Safe, 2020)

## Downtown Business Hours Consolidated

A map centralizes information about which businesses are open, new business hours, and what they offer:

<https://bit.ly/DTMacOpeningUpdates>

The map is divided into layers for restaurants, retail, bars and nightlife, services, and attractions and entertainment.

<https://www.facebook.com/NTMacon/>

# Venue Safety Challenges

## Gap in Formal Hospitality Association

Although hospitality business owners/operators do convene informally, there is no official association that meets regularly to address trends and issues and collaboratively develop solutions.

## No Guide for Opening a Nightlife Business

There is no organized guide outlining procedures for how to open a hospitality business. Current documentation is out-of-date, such as the recommendation to apply for a business license first, then an alcohol license (not true). Criminal background checks are the most time-consuming aspect of the process, forcing business owners to wait to open their space until they receive clearance.

## No Nightlife-Specific Security Guard Training

There are no standards or training required by the city or state for hiring nightlife security staff. Per Georgia law, bars and nightclubs are not required to employ security guards. Unarmed security guards don't need a license, just 24 hours training and a background check. There are state requirements for security guards hired from security companies per the Georgia Board of Private Detective and Security Agencies, but not when individuals are hired for security jobs.

## Closing Time Rules Confusion

According to County Ordinance, places with on-sale alcohol licenses may serve customers until 2:00 a.m., but patrons are allowed to stay until 3:00 a.m. without further alcohol service (Macon-Bibb County Code of Ordinances Secs. 4-129–4-140. ARTICLE VI, 2019). However, most licensees, and many city employees involved with managing those licensees, are not clear on this point. There is little consistent enforcement, and certainly with that, some abuse of the rules by venues. Anecdotally, some patrons have been able to access alcohol past 2:00 a.m. either if they bring it in themselves or if a business sells for example, "\$3 orange juice with free champagne."

## No Communication System between Venue Security

No formal or informal communication system (e.g. text chain) to notify other operators or security staff of problematic patrons or other issues.

## Over-Use of Special Event Permits

"18-21 nights" are supposed to be special events, but some venues have them almost every night.

## Alcohol Handler's Permit

Bartenders and their supervisors are required to get an alcohol handler's permit, which is renewed annually for \$25. However, servers/wait staff are not required to get the permit, even though they are in charge of checking IDs, taking the order and serving beverages to the customer (BDS, 2020). Responsible beverage service training is usually required for both bartenders and servers; the omission of servers in the permit is a significant gap.



# Venue Safety Challenges | COVID-19

## Slow Reopening Despite State Allowance

In Macon, the state's lifting of shelter-in-place orders and allowed reopening of restaurants was met with mixed reactions. As of May 1, 2020, only one downtown restaurant (a chain) reopened for dine-in service, while other food and beverage businesses continued to operate on a limited schedule with pick-up and delivery options only. Fear initially remained pervasive with the public initially unwilling to reenter the public space or dine in at restaurants. (This fear gradually lessened, and business resumed as the months went on.)

## Loss of Eligibility for Federal Relief Funds

A financial challenge for restaurants that began to reopen and operate (though on a limited basis) was that they were no longer eligible to apply for federal relief programs. Employees expressed fear about not wanting to go back to work, but they no longer qualified for unemployment (because they technically had the opportunity to go back to work). Many restaurateurs expressed concern that if they reopened with a limited capacity and limited schedule, they would not be able to make sufficient revenue to pay their bills.

## Peer Pressure to Reopen

Some business owners felt pressured to reopen indoor dining areas as other businesses began to reopen indoor dining areas due to declining sales from takeout (because customers could eat inside a restaurant nearby).

## Uneven Compliance with Reopening Rules

Compliance differed widely among restaurants that reopened downtown. Some strictly adhered to new rules such as mandating staff wear PPE, abiding by capacity rules, etc. while other venues operated in blatant violation of such rules e.g. operating at full capacity without physical distancing measures. This created a competitive environment.

## Most Businesses Don't Require Mask

The majority of businesses have posted signage requesting patrons to wear masks, however they don't require patrons to wear them. There is fear that if businesses do band together to issue a requirement that they will lose customers to other hospitality businesses in suburban areas outside of the downtown core. One business is requiring mask-wearing, and has received patron hostility.

## Patron Pushback

Hospitality industry representatives report widespread difficulty with patron behavior in regard to voluntarily wearing masks or maintaining physical distance. Staff report open hostility in person and via social media directed towards them if they remind patrons to abide by health guidelines.

## Conflict Resolution with Patrons

Some patrons are making it difficult for venue staff to maintain new public health guidelines e.g. insisting that they sit at an available table, regardless of proximity to other customers, who may be more risk averse.

## Irregular Business Hours

Patrons have expressed confusion about which businesses are open (with irregular business hours) vs. closed (temporarily or permanently). This is due in part to lack of up-to-date information posted online, as well as inconsistent periods of closure when employees test positive. Some venues have shut down for a matter of weeks to quarantine staff.

# Venue Safety Challenges | COVID-19 Continued



## Accessing Federal Relief Funds

Restaurateurs and nightlife entrepreneurs report difficulty learning how to navigate the application process for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL). Some business owners were denied access. NewTown Macon hosted weekly webinars and distributed educational information on these topics. For businesses with small staff (e.g. 10 and under), this is particularly difficult, as there is increased likelihood that all staff were exposed. Businesses with larger numbers of staff (e.g. 50+) are able to keep the business open with other staff.



## Social Media Shaming Against Businesses

Unlike in other parts of the country, businesses are receiving negative reviews when they are too strict about adhering to public health guidelines e.g. requiring customers to wear masks upon entry. It is more the norm in other cities for social media shaming to be about patrons and businesses *not* abiding by public health guidelines.



## Wholesaling of Food by Restaurants

Health department officials say one trend is that restaurants are selling packaged alcohol and packaged food products (e.g. six-pack of beer, packaged ground beef) in addition to their usual menu of items. Pizza places are selling DIY kits to make your own pizza at home. This is being allowed during the public health emergency, but after the official “emergency period” ends, this practice will again likely be prohibited.

## New Health Rules Increase Cost

Restaurants are having to pay additional costs for staff dedicated to disinfection and sanitization, while operating at reduced capacity.

## Bathroom Queue Management

Venues are struggling to find safe ways for customers to queue for the restroom when they have a limited number of restrooms and minimal room for maintaining physical distancing requirements.

# Venue Safety | Gender Perspective

*Based on a women's focus group held in February 2020.*



A variety of factors were discussed about what makes women feel safe within nightlife and hospitality venues. Among ambience and design preferences are factors that facilitate social interaction, including lower music volume so patrons can have a conversation, lounge-oriented seating, soft colors and no TV screens playing sports. Women also prefer a variety of options to choose from, from venues open at night to beverage choices. Cues that an environment may be unsafe or facilitate inappropriate behavior are a disproportionate number of males to females, overcrowding, and male-oriented sports bars with bar seating and only beer available. Men, of course, deserve spaces that make them feel comfortable. However, women tend to be more discerning about what makes them feel comfortable—and if men wish to socialize with women—it would be advisable to create environments where women want to hang out and socialize.

## Inside Nightlife Venues

### What makes women feel safe and comfortable?

- ▣ Places without TV screens playing sports.
- ▣ Intimacy of small, cozy venues.
- ▣ Soft colors.
- ▣ Vinyl records.
- ▣ Cocktail bars (vs. a focus on beer).
- ▣ Lounge-oriented seating.
- ▣ Lower music volume.
- ▣ Seating that allows conversation so you can hear each other.
- ▣ Choice of venues.

### What makes women feel unsafe and uncomfortable?

- ▣ Disproportionate number of guys to girls.
- ▣ Too crowded, where everyone is in a confined space.
- ▣ Limited number of social venues open later at night.
- ▣ Male-oriented sports bars with bar seating and a focus on beer.



# SECTION 4: ENTERTAINMENT



**ENTERTAINMENT IS DEFINED** as indoor social options such as dining, dancing, live entertainment, theater, etc. in the city at night and the systems to recruit and retain talent. Entertainment is also measured by mix of clientele, systems for promotion, and retention of talent. Factors to consider are number of venues, combined number of seats available, hours and economic impact.

## Overview

Downtown Macon is a crown jewel of Central Georgia; it is no wonder that it is considered the premier entertainment destination for the region.

While some still wistfully express regrets over not being “more like Atlanta,” Macon offers a unique experience that merits pride and self-love. Although downtown may not offer multiple options in different “social experience” categories, there are options for different markets such as cozy date spots, gamification and active socializing (e.g. vintage arcade bar, axe throwing, escape room), lounges and live music venues. While there are still market gaps that could bring a broader audience, downtown already has a lot to offer. While hospitality venues in Macon have weathered the economic storm caused by COVID-19 better than other cities with more restrictions, restaurants are missing out on key markets due to the loss of in-person church services and live concerts.

## Entertainment Snapshot: Strengths vs. Challenges

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Regional destination</b> for nightlife and entertainment.</li> <li>▣ <b>Mix of entertainment offerings</b> and social activities at night.</li> <li>▣ <b>Legacy as a music city</b> and historic music story.</li> <li>▣ <b>Instagram culture</b> tapped into.</li> <li>▣ <b>Brand: #WhereSoulLives</b></li> <li>▣ <b>Some small, intimate lounge spaces</b> preferred by women.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Webpage consolidates info</b> on businesses that are open, new hours, etc. for retail, dining and nightlife.</li> <li>▣ <b>Local talent planned to be showcased</b> in the first scheduled shows after the COVID-19 lockdown of live music venues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Market gaps</b>, especially for young professionals, Jingles (older adults), middle class Black residents, and the LGBTQ community.</li> <li>▣ <b>Education of suburban visitors</b> on how to stay safe while downtown.</li> <li>▣ <b>Disconnect in messaging by hotel staff</b>, who urge visitors to stay away from downtown.</li> <li>▣ <b>Culture of not valuing live music</b>, thus unwilling to pay for shows.</li> <li>▣ <b>Comparisons to Atlanta</b> of what Maconites aspire their downtown to be like.</li> <li>▣ <b>Diversity, equity and inclusion:</b> negative perceptions of downtown by people of color (POC), limited inclusion in social venues, low engagement in programming events, and low number of business ownership by POC.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Business closures</b> (permanent &amp; temporary).</li> <li>▣ <b>Patronage is steady but down</b>, due to fears about going out by risk-averse demographics.</li> <li>▣ <b>Loss of live music in large occupancy venues</b> has had ripple effects throughout the downtown economy.</li> <li>▣ <b>Restaurants are missing out on key markets</b> at lunch and dinner because of loss of in-person church services, live music and telework.</li> </ul>

# Entertainment Strengths

## Regional Destination

Downtown Macon is a regional destination for residents of Central Georgia and beyond, as evidenced by ticket sales and patronage of events, festivals and shows at downtown venues. One venue reported a 3-4x increase in the number of national acts per year (prior to COVID-19). People who come for entertainment spend their money in downtown retail and hospitality.



## Variety of Entertainment Types

Downtown Macon's businesses represent a wide variety of entertainment activities, with not all focused on alcohol consumption. In fact, downtown is a great case study of encompassing the recommended types of nightlife activity to attract diverse patronage and appeal to women according to RHI research and UK thought leader, Philip Kolvin (former chair of the London Nighttime Commission).



Examples include:

- ❑ Active/competitive socializing (e.g. axe throwing, escape room)
- ❑ Gamification (e.g. arcade bar, board games)



## Tapping into Instagram Culture

Some venues tap into and encourage social media culture through step and repeat banners with great lighting and bathroom selfie lighting.



## Legacy as a Music City

Macon was rated #2 on Fodor Travel website's list of America's 12 Best Music Cities outside of Nashville because of "Macon music legends Otis Redding, Little Richard and the Allman Brothers Band as getting their start in the community and (because of) the contributions Capricorn Records made to the Southern Rock era." (Visit Macon, 2018).

There are "Easter Eggs" hidden throughout downtown for music history fans e.g. where Greg Allman proposed to Cher. Yet they are not publicized or noted with signage. The history of music in Macon is a cultural asset. The Macon Music Story, "Where Soul Lives" is encapsulated in the Macon Music Trail, where "all roads lead back to Macon."

*Photos courtesy of NewTown Macon*

## Live Music Opportunities

Live music is featured in small hospitality venues, events and dedicated performance spaces for local, regional and national acts.

# Entertainment Strengths | COVID-19

## Creative Concepts and Pivoting

Some high-end restaurants switched to a reservation system for takeout, where you order the day before what you want to pick up the next day. Those businesses were able to do well during the pandemic.

## Regional Talent to be Showcased

Given nationwide limits on travel and touring, entertainment venues are pulling from a more local and regional base of talent.

## Ticket Sales for Contact Tracing

When shows restart, ticket sales can be used potentially for contact tracing.

## Creative Approaches to Re-Vision Music and Nightlife

To adapt to capacity limits, live entertainment venues are considering the possibility of two separate performances/night—one in the early evening around 6:00 p.m. and a later show around 10:00 p.m. Performers will likely need to reduce the length of their show to compensate.



*Photo courtesy of Hargray Capitol Theatre.*

# Entertainment Challenges

## Market Gaps

Most commonly cited gaps in dining and entertainment options were for the following markets: young professionals, Jingles (older adults), middle class Black residents, and the LGBTQ+ community. Older adults in particular are seeking places to have fun but “where they won’t lose their dignity.”

## Education of Suburban Markets

Suburban Maconites who live in North Macon are a target group for downtown patronage, but they need education and better downtown navigation infrastructure to feel safe e.g. where to park, wayfinding signs to help them find amenities, reminders not to leave valuables in their cars. The perceived convenience of North Macon’s hospitality amenities competes with downtown’s unique offerings.

## Comparisons to Atlanta

Atlanta is often used as point of comparison to what Maconites aspire their downtown to be like. Atlanta is described as “having something for everyone—good food, good places to talk, dance, nice seating, ambiance, clean and upscale.” In addition to social offerings and amenities, Atlanta is considered to be more inclusive and welcoming for Black patrons and business owners. It’s described as being a “black downtown” with a “black nightlife.”

## Disconnect in Messaging by Hotel Staff

Downtown is a major selling point and attraction for visitors, yet hotel staff reportedly suggest that visitors avoid downtown because of the perception that it’s not safe.

## Culture of not Paying for Music

There is a culture (nationwide) of patrons balking at the cost of cover charges (which usually cover the venue’s cost of hiring entertainment).



Photo courtesy of Hargray Capitol Theatre



Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon: 2020 Seuss on the Loose



Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon & Jessica Whitley, 2020 Brooke Haven



Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon & Jessica Whitley, 2020 Biz Volume

# Entertainment Challenges Continued

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in Nightlife Venues

### Perceptions of Downtown

Participants of color report that Black residents don't feel welcome downtown. This negative perception may be a barrier to achieving greater representation of patrons downtown.



### Diversity and Inclusion in Venues

Certain venues are known for having a predominantly white or black audience (i.e. lack of diverse patronage), while others draw a more diverse crowd.

Yet even in diverse social settings, per observational tours by RHI staff, there seemed to be minimal intermixing and inclusion of different races/ethnicities (either by friends, coworkers or couples).



### Diverse Business Owners and Programming Curation

Venues that either are owned/operated by people of color or that provide diverse music and entertainment acts tend to draw more inclusive patronage. Programming and activities designed by people of color who are business owners/operators are also key to attracting a diverse audience.

People of color are reportedly opening businesses outside the downtown core. However, with the approaching second iteration of the Downtown Diversity Initiative, Downtown is primed to attract more minority operators.



*Note: events are cited as bringing a more diverse cross-section of the community together.*

# Entertainment Challenges | COVID-19

## Restaurants Impacted by Loss of Markets

Because churches are not yet (as of September 2020) hosting in-person services, restaurants are missing a key market for lunch. Because live music (especially from Hargray Capitol Theatre) is not open, restaurants are impacted by loss of dinner crowds (Miller, 2020).

## Bars and Clubs Struggling

Businesses that don't sell food, like bars and clubs, are struggling to survive, despite being allowed to reopen.

## Live Music Venues Struggling

Downtown's largest live music venue, the Hargray Capitol Theatre (650-capacity), has been struggling to survive since the pandemic. Although the venue received a PPP loan, it only provided short-term relief for the venue (Ruggieri, 2020).

Hubble Beasley, the general manager, says "...their last event was March 7, anything scheduled beyond that Saturday had to be cancelled. The general manager considered reopening with modifications but came to the conclusion that it wouldn't be feasible. With less tickets being sold, costs would be passed on to customers. Not to mention, many groups have stopped touring." (Miller, 2020)

Some restaurants have featured a musician, yet dedicated performance venues have yet to reopen. Local live shows at dedicated performance venues are projected to begin by early 2021; national shows may be pushed back until summer of 2021. National tours depend on booking at least 30 cities consecutively, but this isn't possible without more consistency in national reopening of music venues.

## Economic Value (and Loss) of Live Music in Macon

According to Beasley, their average ticket cost is about 20 dollars. That could mean for each show, the theatre adds over \$150,000 to Macon's local economy. Beasley estimates that yearly, they generate \$5 million dollars for the city, from restaurants to hotels. "One ticket generates two to three meals, a hotel room, if they go out to drinks afterward, so there's a lot more money generated per individual person coming from a ticket than people think there are," the manager explains. (Miller, 2020).

"Live music in Macon adds between \$3 and \$5 million to the local economy every year... for every dollar spent on tickets sales, \$12 to \$15 is spent in the community," states Hubble Beasley, General Manager of the Hargray Capitol Theater (Ruggieri, 2020).

The inability of live music venues to operate not only affects the venues' employees, but also impacts the broader social economy i.e. musicians, promoters, lighting technicians, as well as the restaurants and other local businesses that live music patrons would visit before and after attending a show (Ruggieri, 2020).

# Entertainment | Gender Perspective

Based on a women's focus group held in February 2020.

Macon has a variety of social offerings for entertainment, focus group participants discovered, when asked to brainstorm different kinds of social experiences. There was agreement that downtown is at its best during events and festivals, when even retailers stay open later to take advantage of the increased pedestrian traffic. However, participants commented that downtown is missing key staples (movie theaters, skating, bowling) and is missing out on key markets (LGBTQ+, social dancing, etc.). Further, more adventurous and progressive residents and visitors desire more diverse dining options that cater to different interests and dietary restrictions. Overall, downtown does notably offer unique social options for a wide range of markets.



## Social Offerings

What are Macon's Strengths?	What's Missing in Social Offerings?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Events and festivals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Holiday events and event experiences.</li> <li>○ Great festivals e.g. film, Bragg Fest, Cherry Blossom.</li> <li>○ Soap Box Derby.</li> <li>○ During events, retail businesses stay open later.</li> <li>○ First Friday.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▣ <b>Music</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Local, regional, national talent.</li> <li>○ Smaller venues to tap into local music talent.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▣ <b>Competitive socializing/Active Socializing:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Axe throwing.</li> <li>○ Opening soon: rock climbing.</li> <li>○ Pole Dancing Studio</li> </ul> </li> <li>▣ <b>Gamification</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Arcade bar.</li> <li>○ Just Tap'd – board games.</li> <li>○ Escape room – Situation Room.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▣ <b>Dueling piano bar</b></li> <li>▣ <b>Food:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Great burgers.</li> <li>○ A few nice places for date nights (Lazy Susan, Oliver's, Dovetail).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>LGBT:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Gay bar.</li> <li>○ Gay social spaces.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▣ <b>Seasoned Folks:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lounges for older, seasoned women.</li> <li>○ Jazz club.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▣ <b>Food</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ More diverse cultural food.</li> <li>○ Restaurants that don't close on Mondays.</li> <li>○ Food that caters to dietary restrictions (pescatarian, GF options) – just a few that do.</li> <li>○ More places to go for a nice date night.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▣ <b>Activities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Movies.</li> <li>○ Skating ramps.</li> <li>○ Bowling.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▣ <b>Social Dancing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Country line dancing.</li> <li>○ Carolina shag dance.</li> <li>○ Stepping.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Entertainment | Gender Perspective

Based on a women's focus group held in February 2020.



Social venues are the ultimate crossroads where race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation meet. The most vibrant social economies offer venues where all people feel welcome, included and safe. The level of diversity, equity and inclusion in a downtown can be evaluated quantitatively by ownership, staff and patronage representing diverse backgrounds.

However, there are also anecdotal reports of what contributes to a feeling of being welcomed and valued in social venues. A women's focus group revealed that some stigmas are deeply ingrained within the mindsets and heart sets of some members of the Macon community. Some focus group participants reported being on the receiving end of subtle and overt cues/microaggressions that made them feel uncomfortable in certain environments. Part of the journey to making social spaces more diverse, inclusive and equitable will be recognizing stigmas and conscientiously working to provide greater opportunities for diverse entrepreneurship and change.

*Note: The information presented here does not necessarily represent the views of all project participants; these are the candid observations and perceptions expressed by the participants of the women's focus group.*

## Race and Gender

### What Makes People of Color Feel Welcome, Valued and Included in Downtown Macon?

- ☐ Events that draw the community together: e.g. Toast of Macon, Kingle Krawl
- ☐ Staff (e.g. host/hostess, owner, servers) that acknowledge you, engage you in friendly conversation.

### What makes People of Color (POC) feel unwelcome, not valued, excluded?

- ☐ If you're the only people of color in the room and you get stared at by other customers and staff.
- ☐ Different experience going out with a group of white girls vs. group of black girls in restaurants.
- ☐ Receiving reminders like, "Make sure you tip."
- ☐ Don't feel at home here like I do when I'm in Atlanta.
- ☐ Being greeted differently by the host/hostess i.e. not as friendly a greeting, not looking in my eyes.
- ☐ Defaulting to the idea that I'm not operating my business legally.

## LGBTQ

### What Makes Queer People Feel Welcome, Valued and Included in Downtown Macon?

- ☐ Seeing other queer kids at nightlife venues like Late Night.
- ☐ Macon Pride Event (first in a long time).

### What makes LGBTQ Women Feel Unwelcome, Not Valued, Excluded?

- ☐ Gap in queer spaces downtown that are dedicated to the LGBGTQ community. There are tons of young gay students who don't feel like they have a safe space to go out/hang out.
- ☐ Gap in "gay nights" at nightclubs.

### What May Help?

- ☐ Staff training may help for hosts/hostesses, owners and servers.
- ☐ Bystander intervention among other customers.

# SECTION 5: PUBLIC SPACE



Public space vibrancy offers a continuum of outdoor activities such as sidewalk dining, outdoor seating, street performers, markets, food vendors, festivals, and art walks at night. Truly vibrant cities maintain social activity at all times of day, evening and late at night. But vibrancy requires work. It takes systems to support venues, nurture performers and provide opportunities for entrepreneurs to showcase their talent.

## Overview

Downtown truly comes alive during special events and festivals, when the streets are filled with people, and food trucks and vendors sell artesanal crafts. The passing of legislation to allow open-carry of alcohol throughout downtown everyday was in some ways trying to bring the atmosphere of fun from First Friday to downtown everyday. Some participants expressed desire for more of an event atmosphere on non-event days, with street performance, vendors and food trucks. While the ample outdoor space and sidewalk infrastructure wouldn't preclude such activity from taking place, caution is urged to coordinate and program such activity so that it is organized and also not in competition with already struggling brick-and-mortar businesses. Despite fears of taking away a limited pool of customers, such street activation can actually drive more foot traffic into downtown, as the "street becomes a venue" for entertainment. While Macon didn't fall in line with many other cities during the pandemic with full street closures to allow for open-air dining, businesses that already had sidewalk café infrastructure benefitted from risk-averse populations seeking safe socializing options in outdoor spaces.

## Public Space Snapshot: Strengths vs. Challenges

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Events and festivals</b> attract a multi-generational audience.</li> <li>❑ <b>Alleyway pedestrian experience</b> enhanced by Bright City project.</li> <li>❑ <b>Organic street performer</b> presence.</li> <li>❑ <b>Some public art</b> in public space.</li> <li>❑ <b>Many businesses already had outdoor patios</b> for dining.</li> <li>❑ <b>Food trucks fill a gap</b> in nighttime food options.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Alcohol can be openly carried downtown</b> everyday per new ordinance, similar to First Friday. No incidents reported in 2020.</li> <li>❑ <b>Some outdoor seating activity</b> in restaurant patios.</li> <li>❑ <b>Picnic tables added</b> to Poplar Street, Third Street and Mulberry Street.</li> <li>❑ <b>First Friday and Sunday Funday events</b> starting to bring back patrons downtown (as of August 2020).</li> <li>❑ <b>Revitalization of Roxy Park</b> (on outskirts of downtown) underway to create a pedestrian plaza and food park for food trucks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Daytime vibrancy impacted by large empty footprints</b> left by nightlife venues that operate at night.</li> <li>❑ <b>DEI:</b> Representation of POC in planning events and activities.</li> <li>❑ <b>Public spaces</b> are under-utilized.</li> <li>❑ <b>Food trucks</b> only allowed during events.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <b>Limited interest in wide-scale alfresco dining</b> on an entire block level.</li> <li>❑ <b>Increased vacancies expected</b>, which may impact walkability and detract from the outdoor experience.</li> </ul>

# Public Space Strengths

## Events and Festivals

Macon hosts excellent events such as Cherry Blossom festival, two Beer fests, Christmas Light Extravaganza, Bragg Jam, Soap Box Derby, and First Friday. During events, retail businesses stay open later, contributing to the vibrancy and energy downtown. Events draw a diverse, multi-generational audience, including families and Jingles.



## Alleyway Experience Enhanced

The alleyway experience has reportedly improved greatly through plants and public art, which have improved perceptions of safety, in large part thanks to the Bright City project: “Bright City, a major public art experience, brings light and photography to Macon’s beautifully unique alleyways making them an easier, more vibrant way to navigate downtown. Bright City features a curated group of local and national photographers...Photographs have been turned into light boxes and presented along the brick path of Macon’s Second Street Lane” (Malone, 2020).



## Organic Street Performance

There are some examples of “organic” (unplanned, unstructured) street performers setting up in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street area near the areas formerly occupied by statues, as well as musicians setting up on medians on Poplar Street (Poplar Park between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> street). In that case, there’s room for people to enjoy it while sitting on park benches.



## Public Art

The city has occasionally placed public art sculptures, but there is opportunity for more intentional activation of streets and sidewalks.



## Public Space Strengths | COVID-19



### Outdoor Dining

Many hospitality businesses already had outdoor dining areas/sidewalk cafes. Some businesses converted parking spaces into outdoor dining areas. Picnic tables have been added to Poplar Street, Third Street and Mulberry Street.

Third Street and Mulberry Street.



### Sunday Funday

A Sunday Funday initiative encouraged businesses to put retail goods in the street in the spirit of a sidewalk sale.

### First Friday Events

The first and subsequent First Friday events since the start of the pandemic (as of August 2020) showed a marked increase in patronage. More patrons are notably wearing masks.



### Alcohol Open-Carry Allowed Everyday



As of August 25, 2020, open containers of alcohol can be carried and consumed in downtown between 4-10 p.m. every day instead of just during each First Friday. The County Commission approved the rule through the end of 2020 to help businesses increase sales and support outdoor socializing during the pandemic. Participants are supposed to use a designated plastic cup and wear a wristband for age verification (SFGATE 2020).

NewTown Macon is in charge of registering participating businesses (only establishments licensed to sell beverage alcohol) and for distributing approved containers and wristbands. Anecdotally, no enforcement agency is watching to confirm compliance with the rules, but there haven't yet been issues.

### Roxy Park Revitalization Underway

There is a plan underway to activate the area surround Roxy Theatre through placemaking, beautification and programming of the pedestrian plaza. Activation plans will include food trucks and local artist installations, as well as enhanced pedestrian safety and walkability plans (Associated Press, 2020).

# Public Space Challenges

## Daytime Vibrancy Impacted

Entertainment venues that operate at night detract from daytime vibrancy, as they sit empty and create a perception of a “dead zone.”

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in Events

Events draw a more diverse audience both generationally and in race/ethnicity. However, criticism has been expressed about the lack of representation by people of color on event planning committees.

## Public Space Management

The prevalent strategy for reopening dining and nightlife is to expand the footprint of private venues into the streets, sidewalks and public spaces. One challenge is a question of jurisdiction. Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning Commission regulates private property. Meanwhile, the Urban Development Authority regulates sidewalk activities and outdoor dining.

## Food Trucks



Perceived as competition by brick and mortars, food trucks are prohibited from operating downtown except during special

events. They must receive permits for operation from both the event organizer and the health department. (Health dept permitting depends on whether food preparation occurs at a separate facility or through the mobile truck).

However, food trucks do unofficially set up in parking lots and alleys during nighttime hours, when food options are limited. They may therefore fill a market gap in providing a variety of food options after 10:00 p.m.

# Public Space Challenges | COVID-19

## Lack of Interest in District-Wide Alfresco Dining Models

Unlike other cities throughout the country, there has been limited interest in closing streets or expanding sidewalks for outdoor dining areas. In Macon, guests are allowed to eat inside dining areas with no restrictions on capacity or guest party size.

There also seems to be less fear and discomfort around eating inside in Macon compared to other cities with more vigilant self-compliance with public health guidelines. Further, there was concern that the public would prefer on-street parking in lieu of an outdoor dining experience.

Some businesses have put outdoor seating in the medians in parks. Further, while some businesses are using outdoor seating or have been using it for some time, not all have the official sidewalk permit, which has rules about accessibility.

## Vacancies

There is anticipation of an increase in vacancies downtown as not all businesses are able to sustain operations during the pandemic.



*Photos courtesy of NewTown Macon*

# SECTION 6: QUALITY OF LIFE



QUALITY OF LIFE FOR RESIDENTS in mixed-use social districts entails a balance of social amenities and requires effective management of sound, litter, trash, bio-waste and patron behavior. Updated policies, consistent enforcement and conflict resolution systems help facilitate high standards for quality of life.

## Overview

Macon has been called a great place to live, in large part because of the social amenities offered by its vibrant downtown. Home to events, dining and nightlife, the walkable downtown is a center for community life.

However, downtown still struggles with perceptions of not being welcoming to people of color, yet dining and entertainment venues owned, operated and staffed by the diverse community is slowly eroding the legacy from the racial divide and redlining.

Nighttime social activity hasn't yet generated significant complaint from the small resident base, but this may change as new residential housing is completed and a planned hotel completes construction. As Macon continues to grow in vibrancy, new systems—for sound mitigation, waste management, etc.—will be needed to ensure that currently high standards for quality of life are maintained.

## Quality of Life Snapshot: Strengths vs. Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>“Great place to live”</b> for events, dining, nightlife and festivals.</li> <li>▣ <b>Called a “city within a park”</b> due to the network of community parks and walking trails.</li> <li>▣ <b>Growth in downtown residential and visitor base</b> due to new housing and hotel developments planned.</li> <li>▣ <b>Destination for seniors.</b> Designated “age-friendly” by AARP.</li> <li>▣ <b>Rare for neighbors to call in sound complaints</b> about social venues operating at night.</li> <li>▣ <b>Cleanliness and lack of litter</b> due to BID’s Clean Team.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Shop Local initiative</b> to rally the community to support local businesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Co-existence and livability challenges</b> between residents and commercial businesses anticipated.</li> <li>▣ <b>Perception that downtown is not welcoming</b> to people of color.</li> <li>▣ <b>Sound ordinance</b> needs updates to reflect a mixed-use zone with active nighttime use.</li> <li>▣ <b>Sound complaints</b> usually due to chronic complainants or b/c of unsheltered people playing pianos in the night. More sound complaints anticipated when new residents arrive.</li> <li>▣ <b>Gap in sound management systems</b> for reporting complaints, monitoring and enforcement of sound issues.</li> <li>▣ <b>No mechanisms to disclose to new residents</b> about existing nightlife activity.</li> <li>▣ <b>No additional sound mitigation standards</b> required when residences or hotels are proposed in proximity to existing commercial businesses.</li> <li>▣ <b>Lack of coordination for garbage</b> collection.</li> <li>▣ <b>Public urination</b>, especially in alleyways, due to lack of public restrooms.</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <b>Increase in homeless population</b> and people seeking services at social services.</li> </ul>

# Quality of Life Strengths



Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon & Jave Bjorkman



Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon & Jessica Whitley, 2020



Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon & Jessica Whitley, 2020

## A Great Place to Live

In an informal poll by *The Telegraph*, Macon's lifestyle/attractions and location were the top two reasons residents rated Macon as a great place to live. Favorite activities included "getting out to enjoy nature, the festivals, other events and attractions, (and) dining out." Also, the "big city-small town feel" (Lemoine, 2019).

## Growing Resident Base

There has been significant growth in downtown residential development and an influx of new residents, which is necessary to create the critical mass needed to sustain downtown businesses.

## Destination for Seniors

Macon is known to be a destination for seniors. In fact, "Macon-Bibb was among the first communities to become a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities when it joined in the spring of 2012. Macon-Bibb was the first community in Georgia to be designated age-friendly" (AARP, 2020). It is anticipated that Macon may become a retirement destination. Restaurants' early bird specials (between 5:00-7:00 p.m.) are particularly attractive for Macon's senior population. Seniors (especially those from the suburbs) will not likely be as tolerant of mixed-use sound issues.

## Opportunity to Proactively Address Challenges

Because downtown Macon is in a period of growth and infill, there is still an opportunity to create systems to proactively address anticipated challenges. The new hotel that has been approved for the Central Business District (CBD) on 1st street and Cherry Street, is a key opportunity to institute sound mitigation strategies.

## Cleanliness and Lack of Litter

Overall, downtown is reported to be clean and mostly free of litter due to sufficient trash receptacles and cigarette ash receptacles. This is one of the factors that helps women feel safe, per a women's focus group.

## Shop Local Initiative

Rallied the community to support local businesses, especially during the COVID era.



# Quality of Life Challenges

## Residential Co-existence

To attract residential living downtown, the Planning and Zoning Commission representatives intentionally did not want to over-regulate residential housing development; there was recognition, though, that there may be livability issues later.

As downtown expands its footprint into more industrial areas (in the warehouse district) with loft apartments, there is anticipation of livability challenges and sound complaints from residents.

## Construction Standards for Downtown Residential Housing

There is a gap in elevated construction standards for downtown residential housing, which can help address sound issues.



Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon, June 2020



Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon

## Livability Issues

Walkability, parking, safety – these are already being brought up. Growth in residents will make these needs more apparent.

## Infrastructure

The question was raised about whether downtown Macon's infrastructure (sewer, trash collection, water, electricity) can handle a growth in food and beverage businesses, which are massive generators of trash and waste.

## Garbage Collection

Reported to be in need of coordination.

## Bio-Waste

Public urination, especially in alleyways.

## Increase in Homelessness

Increased presence of an unsheltered population, especially using public spaces and parks e.g. Central City Park, which is in proximity to a homeless resource center. This impacts the ability for developers to attract new development and also creates a negative perception of safety.

Vulnerable communities (e.g. people facing housing scarcity, women, children) are taken advantage of in homeless encampments. Safety incidents also negatively contribute to the perception of safety.

When streets are empty with no eyes on the street, presence of people experiencing homelessness exacerbates negative perceptions of safety, especially if they panhandle. Business owners expressed that they feel unsupported by government in helping to address challenges with aggressive transients and homeless who accost customers.

# Quality of Life Challenges Continued

## Sound Management

### Ordinance Language

Macon-Bibb County's sound ordinance is located in the Code of Ordinances, Part III, Chapter 15, Article 2 (sec. 15-26 (a-e)).

The ordinance says that unreasonably loud, disturbing, and unnecessary noise is prohibited. In addition, during the following times, a violation of the ordinance is deemed when noise is "readily audible" inside another residence or building with doors and windows closed: Sunday-Thursday 9:00 p.m.-7:00 a.m. and Friday-Saturday 11:00 p.m.-9:00 a.m. Types of noise are defined in the ordinance, and include voices, (yelling, shouting, whistling, or singing) and also includes animals inside and outside.

### Complaint System

No 311 service for sound complaints and other non-emergency calls. People call 911 to report a sound complaint. This clogs up the system for life-threatening and urgent emergencies.

## Enforcement

According to interviews, sound complaints are within the jurisdiction of the Sheriff's office, although no entity is stipulated in the code as a definitive enforcement agency.

Thus, technically, sheriffs are in charge of sound enforcement, but it is not a high priority compared to calls for service for public safety. Planning and Zoning Commission staff are authorized to enforce sound ordinance rules and have informally borrowed sound meters from police (or bought their own) to help resolve sound complaints. However, there isn't a consistent system for sound monitoring and enforcement. Note: Code enforcement doesn't handle sound complaints (this is a typical alternate agency to police or sheriff's office to address this type of complaint).

## RHI Analysis and Interpretation of Ordinance



It is unusual that "voices" can be deemed a violation, as voices are considered free speech under the U.S. Constitution.

The section which defines musical instruments seems to be the one that would apply to commercial nightlife businesses. It describes "the playing of any radio, television, or other audio device or musical instrument in such a manner as to annoy, or disturb the quiet, comfort, and repose of persons in any office, hospital or in any dwelling, hotel or other type of residence or persons in the vicinity..." This section also excludes schools of music between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.

There is no mention of any audibility standard in the ordinance, nor any method of measurement or ambient levels.

## SECTION 7: MOBILITY



PATRONS AND VENUE STAFF need safe, convenient and efficient transportation between home and to/from social districts at night. Providing nighttime transportation options can enhance the visitor experience; ensure the safety of employees who work night shifts and may be carrying cash tips; expedite the process of clearing a social district at closing time; prevent impaired driving and reduce alcohol-related accidents and injuries; and decrease impacts generated by sound disturbances, fights and disorder from lingering crowds.

### Overview

Downtown has the advantage of excellent design for walkability, particularly during the daytime. Streets are clean and well-maintained with ample sidewalk space and small “mini plazas” with potential for greater activation. Yet like in many downtowns, nighttime walkability is hindered by gaps in lighting, signage and “eyes on the street” in some areas. This is especially true for seniors and women, as they tend to be more vigilant about their public safety. Identifying gaps in walkability will help expand perceptions of safety of downtown and potential patronage of establishments located in areas previously identified as “dead zones.”

Driving personal vehicles is still the primary way that many nighttime economy patrons access social venues. Yet there may come a time for a more coordinated plan involving personal vehicles and ride-hailing services (e.g. Uber, Lyft) as patronage grows and if impaired driving becomes a greater issue. There is a perception of a lack of parking, though it is not due to a lack of supply; instead, signage, convenient proximity and/or perception of safety in accessing parking lots are the primary contributors to this misperception. The lack of a simultaneous closing time for hospitality venues does prevent the closing time crunch (and limited supply) of vehicles to get patrons and employees home safely.

### Mobility Snapshot: Strengths vs. Challenges

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ <b>Walkable downtown</b> due to wide sidewalks and clean, well maintained infrastructure.</li> <li>☐ <b>Ride-share services</b> provide safe rides to/from downtown social venues.</li> <li>☐ <b>Master signage plan</b> has been completed.</li> <li>☐ <b>Demand response service</b> being explored to bring underserved markets downtown.</li> <li>☐ <b>Micro-transit</b> being explored (golf carts).</li> </ul> <p><b>COVID-Era Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ <b>Curbside pick-up service</b> with no parking fees.</li> <li>☐ <b>Open Streets Macon</b> events for cyclists of all ages launch w/ public health precautions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ <b>Negative perceptions about parking</b> supply, wayfinding signage (specific for parking) and access.</li> <li>☐ <b>Gap in overnight parking</b> for potentially impaired drivers.</li> <li>☐ <b>Concern about employees</b> getting to/from work safely.</li> <li>☐ <b>Dead zones</b> due to dim lighting at night.</li> </ul>

# Mobility Strengths

## Ample Sidewalk Infrastructure

Downtown Macon has the benefit of wide sidewalks. In some cases, there are as much as 25 feet from curb to building due to underground cellars/basements. The design of downtown helps facilitate daytime walkability.



## Master Signage Plan Complete

As of April 2020, there was a plan for new signage to be purchased and installed. This will help address the issue of visitors reporting difficulty in finding parking lots.



Wayfinding “cubes” have been purchased with installation starting in July 2020. The cubes will be strategically located in high-pedestrian traffic areas such as First and Poplar, Third and Cherry streets, Second and Poplar and at the corner

of Second and Cherry streets (Fabian, 2020). However, parking-specific signage remains a need to be addressed.

*Photo shows example of a “Wayfinding Cube” planned for installation. Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon.*

## Curbside Pick-Up

To facilitate convenience of to-go orders and curbside pick-up, Park Macon-Bibb and the Urban Development Authority bagged meters to provide free parking in front of retail stores and restaurants.



*Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon & Mark Thompson: 2016 Garage Meet*

## Micro Transit Being Explored

Unlike in other cities, where micro-transit is oriented to scooters or electric bicycles, golf carts are being explored for the downtown in areas where the speed limit is less than 25 mph. Potential markets include Mercer University students during the peak surges in the morning, lunch and nighttime.

## Ride-Share Services Present

Presence of Uber and Lyft have supplemented minimal taxi service to provide safe rides to Maconites during the day and night.

## Demand Response Service

Similar to Uber and Lyft, but operating more as a van pool, demand response service is being explored. The intention is to address service issues and provide opportunities to get downtown by vulnerable communities without access to mobility services.

# Mobility Challenges

## Parking

### Supply and Convenience

Perception of insufficient parking, but the issue may be misperceived. Parking lots and garages do not have adequate wayfinding signage, making them difficult to find, especially at night. There is also insufficient signage to explain how meters work, which make them confusing for visitors. (Meters run until 8:00 p.m.).

### Parking Safety

Some reports of homeless people breaking into cars contribute to negative perceptions of safety in parking lots. Concerns were reported about employees having to carry cash to parking lots after their shifts. Residents reported parking further away from home if they see homeless people or transients in the parking lot closest to their homes.

### Overnight Parking

People who over-consume alcohol don't have a safe place to leave their cars overnight, forcing them to drive while potentially intoxicated.

### No Dedicated Lanes for Safety Vehicles

No lane dedicated to emergency vehicles downtown, representing a challenge if a public safety incident occurs.

### No Bike Lanes

No dedicated lanes for bicycles or other forms of micro-transit, such as e-scooters or rideshare bikes (which have not yet been introduced in Macon).

## Nighttime Dead Zones

Certain areas are considered “dead zones” where walkability is impacted by negative perceptions of safety due to dim lighting. Among the dead zones identified by a women’s focus group include: Cherry Street from 3<sup>rd</sup> to MLK. Participants noted they avoid patronizing venues along that path due to the lack of lighting.



*Photo courtesy of NewTown Macon*

# Mobility | Gender Perspective

*Based on a women's focus group in February 2020.*



Women make a series of decisions prior to going out and while they're in a social district at night to monitor and maintain their personal safety. From planning how to arrive and safely return home after a night out to constant vigilance while on foot, women patrons are noted for their conscientious diligence in safety. While some women prefer to drive themselves and park, most others prefer a ride-hailing service to avoid parking or risk driving while impaired. Some women may even take alternate walking routes or park farther from home to avoid a situation or people perceived

to be unsafe. Perceptions of safety when using different modes of transportation can be a key factor in women's decision making of whether to go out or stay in.

## What steps do you take for your safety at night?

- Take Uber.
- Drive and park.
- Use a designated driver.
- Don't text on my phone if walking by myself.
- I'll park farther away from home if I see shady people near where I usually park or to avoid a confrontation.

## What makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable when driving or using transportation at night?

- Reports of homeless people who broke into cars in parking lots.
- North Macon folks may be unfamiliar with where to park (they expect to be able to park right in front, but they may have to use a parking deck).

## Ideas

- Valet parking to cater to older patrons, theater-goers and North Maconites.
- Dedicated areas to be picked up by an Uber or Lyft.



# APPENDIX I: BACKGROUND CONTEXT

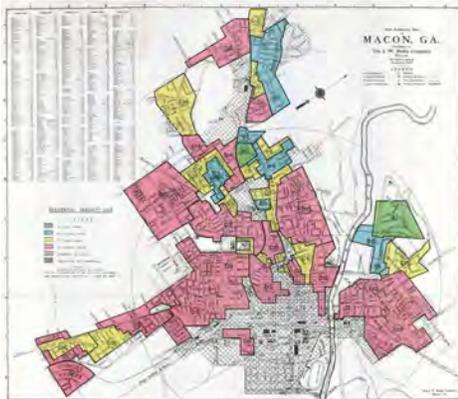
## City/County Consolidation

On July 31, 2012, voters in Macon (57.8 percent approval) and Bibb County (56.7 percent approval) passed a referendum to merge the governments of the city of Macon and most of unincorporated Bibb County, based on the authorization of House Bill 1171, passed by the Georgia General Assembly earlier in the year; four previous consolidation attempts (in 1933, 1960, 1972, and 1976) had failed.

Under the consolidation, the governments of Macon and Bibb County were replaced with a single mayor and a nine-member countywide commission elected to office by county districts. A portion of Macon that extends into nearby Jones County was disincorporated from Macon. Robert Reichert was the first mayor of Macon-Bibb after the election in September 2013.

After consolidation with the Macon Police Department in 2014, the Bibb Sheriff’s Office is the law enforcement authority for the county.

## Poverty and Inequality



Macon, like many cities in the South, has a legacy of inequality based on race and class. “In Macon, Ga., 65 percent of neighborhoods were marked ‘hazardous’ in the 1930s, making it the most redlined city in the United States.” (Jan 2018). Of the top ten “redlined” cities, eight are in the South.

“Redlining” refers to the discriminatory practice of assessing the risk of lending money or extending credit to people who live in certain areas based on the racial and ethnic composition of the area’s residents. Zones noted in red were marked as “hazardous” by the Home Owners

Loan Corporation (HOLC) maps from the 1930s (see example above).

A study by National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC) demonstrated that the “enduring legacy” of redlining is “especially dramatic in the ten cities with the most neighborhoods graded ‘hazardous.’ Today, they remain ‘hypersegregated’” with residents maintaining low to moderate incomes. Jason Richardson, Director of Research at NCRC commented, “It’s as if time stood still in some of these places, locking people into neighborhoods of concentrated poverty.”

CITY	HAZARDOUS %
Macon, GA	64.99%
Birmingham, AL	63.91%
Wichita, KS	63.87%
Springfield, MO	60.19%
Augusta, GA	58.70%
Columbus, GA	57.98%
Newport News, VA	57.51%
Muskegon, MI	57.24%
Flint, MI	54.19%
Montgomery, AL	53.11%

The result in Macon is that “1 in 4 residents of Macon County are still below the poverty line, and that rate is 2.5 times higher among black residents” (Meisenhelter, 2018).

This information provides a historical context to understand why some parts of the county, including downtown, are perceived to not be welcoming to people of color.

# APPENDIX II: COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## Role of Georgia State Health Department

Throughout the country, COVID-19 elevated the role of the health department in the operation of all types of businesses, including hospitality establishments. RHI therefore conducted research and interviews with Georgia State health department employees to provide context about the scope of their role.

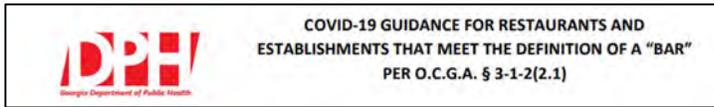
- ▣ **Approach to interactions** with hospitality businesses is education and regulation.
- ▣ **Touch points with the hospitality industry include:**
  - Employee health
  - Food safety
  - Alcohol (only if fruit is used for mixed drinks). Health department provides guidelines for cleaning of fruit, cleaning of glassware and service of mixed drinks using fruit.
  - Some environmental safety
- ▣ **Health permits**
  - Issued during the process of acquiring a certificate of occupancy.
  - Auto-renew, depending on the number of “educational opportunities” (i.e. inspections).
- ▣ **Inspections are unannounced.** In Macon Bibb County, inspections are done 3 times per year.
- ▣ **Cannot deny service for the lack of a permit.** So hypothetically, a business can continue to have a food service permit even if they haven’t paid (note: this is rare compared to other state health departments).
- ▣ **Department organization:** In Georgia, all health department programs are under one state agency, which is divided into 18 public health districts, which each consist of multiple counties. Health permits are therefore issued from the county, but they enforce state regulations.
- ▣ **In Georgia, environmental health doesn’t have a relation to sound enforcement.** Health department has no jurisdiction over sound. Some state rules are related to sound, but in the context of environmental protection for factories and other industrial uses. *Note: In other states, the health department typically has a role in relation to industrial HVAC-related sound issues for the hospitality industry.*

## Timeline of COVID-19 Restrictions in Macon, Georgia

This timeline is focused on hospitality industry businesses.

*****2020*****	
March 23	“Gov. Brian Kemp orders <b>restaurant dining rooms and bars closed</b> across Georgia” (McKibben, 2020).
April 3	“ <b>The statewide shelter-in-place order</b> went into effect for two weeks, which is later extended through April 30. Kemp extended dining room and bar closures through much of the month of April” (McKibben, 2020).
April 20	“Kemp laid out his aggressive reopening plan for Georgia businesses. The plan included <b>allowing restaurants to resume dine-in service</b> on April 27 under a strict set of <b>39 safety requirements</b> . Under this and subsequent orders, no local municipality can implement stricter measures than those laid out by the governor” (McKibben, 2020).
April 27	“ <b>Georgia restaurants begin reopening</b> . A list of 39 guidelines for restaurants included a requirement for employees to wear masks. Dining rooms were limited to 10 people per 500 square feet and parties of no more than six people. <b>Bars, salad bars, and buffets remained closed</b> ” (McKibben, 2020).
May 1	“ <b>Georgia’s shelter-in-place order for the public is allowed to expire</b> . Bars, buffets, and salad bars remain closed” (McKibben, 2020).
May 12	“Kemp extended state-mandated guideline compliance period for reopened restaurants offering dine-in service through May 31. The new order <b>increases the maximum party size at restaurants from six to 10 people per table and the dining capacity from 10 patrons per 500 square feet to 10 patrons per 300 square feet</b> ” (McKibben, 2020).
June 1	“ <b>Georgia’s bars and nightclubs begin reopening</b> . Like restaurants, bars must follow 39 mandatory safety requirements, including <b>limiting capacity to 25 people or 35 percent</b> of total occupancy and allowing parties of no more than six people” (McKibben, 2020). One of the safety requirements is to only serve drinks to seated customers (Burse 2020).
June 16	“ <b>Georgia restaurants are no longer required to limit the number of people in a dining party or adhere to dining room capacity limits. Bars are allowed up to 50 people or 35 percent total capacity</b> . Buffets and salad bars can reopen with restrictions. All open restaurants and bars must seat <b>people six feet or more apart</b> . Masks are only required to be worn by customer-facing employees” (McKibben, 2020).
July 21	“Macon-Bibb County Commission passed an emergency ordinance <b>requiring face coverings</b> in public spaces with some exceptions” (Eason, 2020).
July 27	“Macon-Bibb County Mayor Robert Reichert <b>vetoed a resolution...</b> that would have required county residents and visitors <b>to wear masks</b> outside of their homes” (Eason, 2020).
August 25	Macon-Bibb county commissioners <b>passed a mandatory mask ordinance in Macon-Bibb county</b> (after the Governor allowed local governments to issue mask mandates). <b>Businesses can opt out</b> by posting a sign that says, “PUBLIC NOTICE THE OPERATOR OF THIS LOCATION DOES NOT CONSENT TO ENFORCING FACE COVERING ORDERS ON THIS PROPERTY” (Eason 2020).

## New Rules for Hospitality Industry During COVID-19



Georgia's Department of Public Health issued the following guidance for hospitality businesses.

### Hospitality Business Practices

#### Occupancy Limits

Initially, bars' occupancy was limited to 25% of total listed fire capacity occupancy. Then, the order was updated: Bars<sup>2</sup> "occupancy shall be limited to 50 persons or 35% of total listed fire capacity occupancy of the entire bar, whichever is greater" (GA DPH, 2020). "Restaurants will no longer be required to limit the number of people in a dining party or adhere to capacity limits per square foot in the dining room, beginning Tuesday, June 16" (McKibben, 2020).

#### Table Seating

"service shall only be provided to seated patrons, or, if not applicable, to patrons in designated areas that are practicing Social Distancing. Bars shall establish seating areas for patrons to discourage loitering at the bar or in commonly trafficked areas..." (GA DPH, 2020).

#### Party Size

"Limit party size at tables to no more than six (6) at establishments meeting the definition of a 'bar.'" (GA DPH, 2020).

#### Physical Distancing

"Redesign seating arrangements to ensure at least six (6) feet of separation from seating to seating or utilize physical barriers to separate groups of seating within six (6) feet" (GA DPH, 2020).

Note: people can be in the bar area if they can maintain physical distance.

### Masks & Face Coverings

All staff who interact with patrons in restaurants and bars are required to wear face coverings. Note: cooks are not required to wear face coverings. Patrons are not required to wear face coverings. (GA DPH, 2020).

There was no requirement for the public to wear masks or face coverings until the state governor loosened restrictions for municipalities. On August 25, 2020, the governor gave local communities the authority to pass a local mask mandate ordinance. Macon-Bibb county commissioners shortly thereafter passed a mandatory mask ordinance in Macon-Bibb county. Businesses can opt out by posting a sign that says, "PUBLIC NOTICE THE OPERATOR OF THIS LOCATION DOES NOT CONSENT TO ENFORCING FACE COVERING ORDERS ON THIS PROPERTY" (Eason 2020).

### Entrances/Exits and Restrooms

"If possible, use an exit from the facility separate from the entrance...Mark ingress/egress to and from restrooms to establish paths that mitigate proximity for patrons and staff." (GA DPH, 2020).

### Procedures when Employees Test Positive

Per health department guidelines, businesses need only to close for the amount of time required to clean and disinfect the COVID-positive employee's workstation.

Contact tracing is not required (i.e. employees who test positive don't have to tell their employer who they've been in contact with).

<sup>2</sup> Bars are defined by the Executive order 06.29.20.02 issued by Governor Kemp as "any premises at which a retailer licensed pursuant to this title to sell alcoholic beverages derives 75 percent or more total annual gross revenue from the sale of alcoholic beverages for consumption on the premises" (GA DPH, 2020).

## Enforcement

“**The local health departments will investigate** any complaints at restaurants, bars, or against temporary event food service workers under their jurisdiction for compliance with the Executive Order requirements. **A written warning will be issued for non-compliance** with the Executive Order for the first complaint.

“**Repeated violations** of the Executive Order for the same restaurant, bar, or temporary event food service worker will be turned over to **local law enforcement or the Georgia State Patrol for enforcement measures**.

**The local health department will enforce** the requirements of the Georgia Food Service Rules and Regulations, Chapter 511-6-1 at all food service establishments.” (GA DPH, 2020).

### Complaint-Driven Enforcement Procedures

Per interviews with health department representatives:

- ▣ **Health department can only act upon complaints related to servers not wearing masks/face coverings** (because patrons aren't required to wear masks) or lack of physical distancing.
  - **If a complaint is received for a business within their jurisdiction**, health department staff initiate a phone or-in person meeting with the business. They document an informal write-up.
  - **If a 2<sup>nd</sup> complaint is received** of the same nature, it is referred to law enforcement. Precedent set in Central Georgia is to bypass the sheriff's department and go to the **Georgia State Patrol** (i.e. state highway patrol). Their goal is not to write citations, but instead to educate.

## Takeout Alcohol

On June 23, 2020, the Georgia State Senate passed “HB879, 42 to 9, which would allow beer, wine, and liquor to be delivered to people's homes from restaurants, bars, convenience stores, and grocery stores...HB879 requires alcohol home deliveries to only be accepted by someone 21 years or older and with proper ID” (McKibben, 2020). However, breweries, brewpubs and distilleries are not allowed to participate (McKibben, 2020).

Per the health department, bars can sell cocktails to go in a sealed container (either packaged to sell or packaged with a lid, but not a disposable lid and straw).

### Georgia Department of Revenue Policy Bulletin ATD 2020-01 Alcohol Retail Licensee FAQ:

**Can a restaurant, brewpub, beer growler or other consumption-on-premises alcohol retail licensee sell alcoholic beverages for carry-out purposes or through a drive-in window?** A restaurant, brewpub, beer growler or other consumption-on-premises alcohol retail licensee may sell wine and beer in UNOPENED packages only to customers for carry-out purposes or through its drive-in window, except: (a) On a day or at any time when the sale of package beer or wine is otherwise prohibited by law; or (b) At any location which is within distances to grounds or buildings where the sale of alcoholic beverages is otherwise prohibited by law. A restaurant, brewpub, beer growler or other consumption-on-premises alcohol licensee is prohibited from selling distilled spirits for carry-out purposes or through its drive-in window.

**Can a restaurant, brewpub, beer growler or other consumption-on-premises alcohol retail licensee offer online sales of alcoholic beverages with curbside delivery or pickup?** No, online sales with curbside delivery or pickup is not a service available to alcohol retail licensees that sell alcoholic beverages for consumption-on-premises.

# APPENDIX III: SOCIAL ASSET INVENTORY

Note: The following information was compiled by RHI staff between July 10-16, 2020 through online research using Yelp, Google and Facebook.

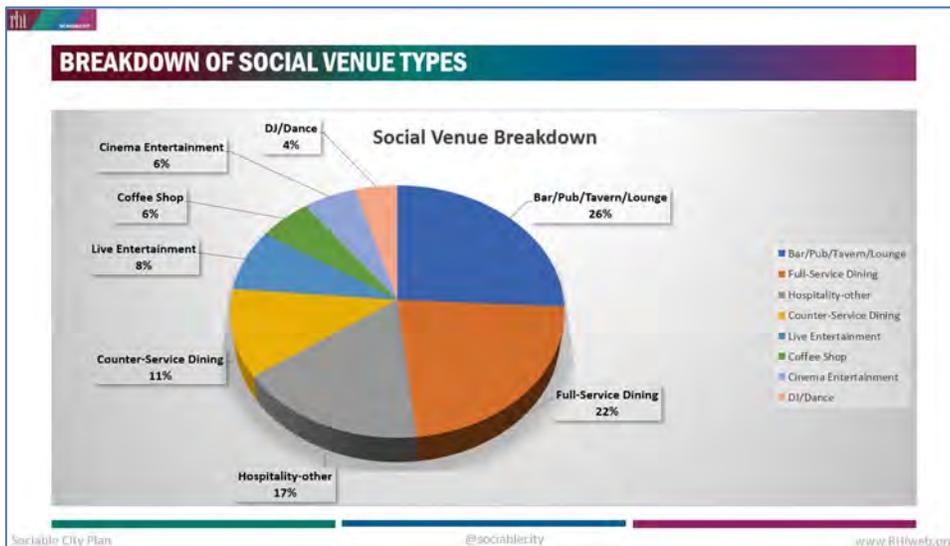
## Downtown Business Inventory (Prior to the Pandemic)

Downtown is comprised of approximately 300 businesses with 30% classified as what RHI calls a “social venue” (bar, club, restaurant, live music venue, or other venues dedicated to socializing).



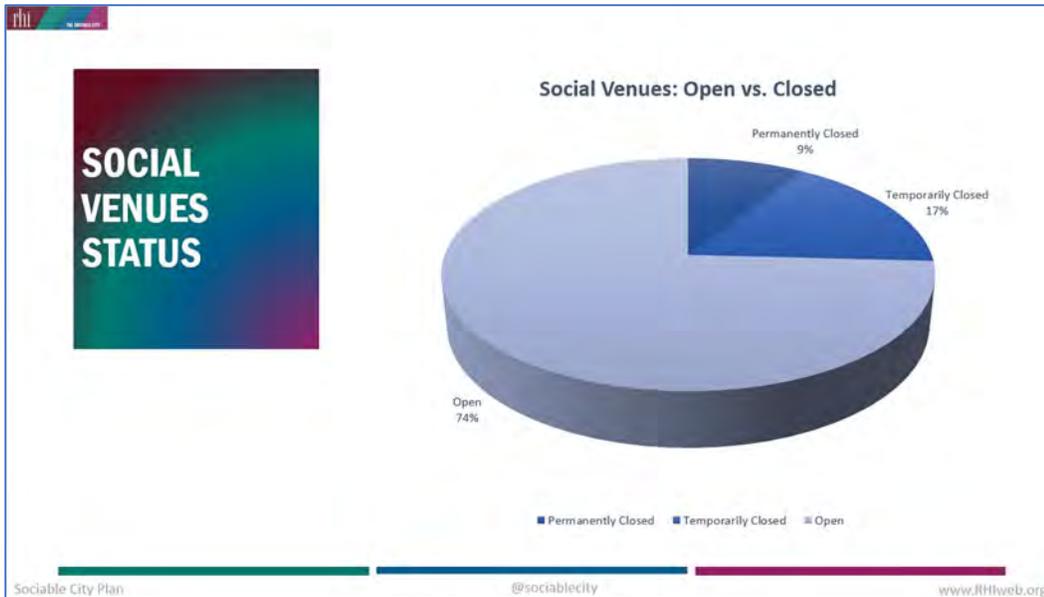
## Breakdown of Types of Social Venues (Prior to the Pandemic)

The majority of social venues downtown are bars/pubs/taverns/lounges (26%), while 22% represent full-service dining establishments. Just 8% of social venues offer live entertainment, while 4% offer dancing.



## Social Venue Closures Due to COVID-19 Pandemic

As of July 16, 2020, 74% of social venues were still open, while 26% were closed. Of the businesses that were closed, 9% were permanently closed and 17% were temporarily closed.



## APPENDIX IV: GENDER PERSPECTIVE SUMMARY



Photos courtesy of NewTown Macon, Jessica Whitley, Luke Ursy, Jave Bjorkman, Hargray Capitol Theatre and Niche.

There is a growing movement in North America to integrate “the perspective of gender” into various facets of society. RHI used this critical lens to analyze Macon’s social economy. A focus group was conducted in February 2020 among a group of women of different ages, life stages and races to discuss nightlife in Macon. Women are often a key barometer of safety. In fact, social preferences by women often coincide with best practices for safety in nightlife venues and social districts. Key findings in Macon include the following.

### Entertainment



**Macon has a variety of social offerings for entertainment, focus group participants discovered, when asked to brainstorm different kinds of social experiences.** There was agreement that downtown is at its best during events and festivals, when even retailers stay open later to take advantage of the increased pedestrian traffic. However, participants commented that downtown is missing key staples (movie theaters, skating, bowling) and is missing out on key markets (LGBTQ+, social

dancing, etc.). Further, more adventurous and progressive residents and visitors desire more diverse dining options that cater to different interests and dietary restrictions. Overall, downtown does notably offer unique social options for a wide range of markets.



### Diversity, Equity and Inclusion



**The level of diversity, equity and inclusion in a downtown can be evaluated quantitatively by ownership, staff and patronage that represent diverse backgrounds.** However, there are also anecdotal reports of what contributes to a feeling of being welcome and valued in social venues. Focus group participants revealed that some stigmas, especially against people of color and the LGBTQ+ community, are deeply ingrained within the mindsets and heart sets of

some members of the Macon community. Focus group participants shared how they have been on the receiving end of subtle and overt cues that made them feel uncomfortable in certain environments. Part of the journey to making social spaces more diverse, inclusive and equitable will be to acknowledge stigmas and conscientiously work to provide greater opportunities for healing, training and diverse entrepreneurship.



## Mobility



**Women make a series of decisions prior to going out and while they're in a social district at night to monitor and maintain their personal safety.** From planning how to arrive and safely return home after a night out to constant vigilance while on foot, women patrons are noted for their conscientious diligence in safety. Some women prefer to drive themselves and park. Yet many others prefer a ride-hailing service to avoid parking or risk driving while impaired. Some women may even take alternate walking routes or park farther from home to avoid situations or people perceived to be unsafe. Perceptions of safety when using different modes of transportation can be a key factor in women's decision making of whether or not to go out or stay in.

## Public Safety



**The physical environment of a downtown social district has a large impact on whether women feel safe at night.** Environmental cues such as good lighting, cleanliness and presence of uniformed ambassadors contribute to a positive perception of safety. However, participants commented that they intentionally avoid areas that are consistently dark, even if it means they intentionally don't patronize social venues they would otherwise like to. Groups of men catcalling or stationed in alleyways contribute to negative perceptions of safety, as well as homeless people who aren't the "regulars" who are deemed safe. Environmental cues such as dim lighting and the smell of urine contribute to a perception that an area is uncared for or unmonitored.

## Venue Safety



**A variety of factors were discussed about what makes women feel safe within nightlife and hospitality venues.** Among ambience and design preferences are factors that facilitate social interaction, including lower music volume so patrons can have a conversation, lounge-oriented seating, soft colors and no TV screens playing sports. Women also prefer a variety of options to choose from, from venues to drink choices. Cues that an environment may be unsafe or facilitate inappropriate behavior are a disproportionate number of males to females, overcrowding, and male-oriented sports bars with bar seating and only beer available. Men, of course, deserve spaces that make them feel comfortable. However, women tend to be more discerning about what makes them feel comfortable—and if men wish to socialize with women—it would be advisable to create environments where women want to hang out and socialize.



# APPENDIX V: PROJECT TIMELINE

## September 27-28, 2019

Jim Peters went to Macon, GA to meet with NewTown Macon staff and team members who attended RHI's Sociable City Summit in Philadelphia.

## February 6-7, 2020: RHI Team Visit to Macon

Jim Peters, Alicia Scholer and Jocelyn Kane visited Macon, GA in February 2020. Meetings were held on Feb 6-7, 2020 with the following groups of stakeholders to orient them to the project and discuss trends and issues in the nighttime economy:

- ☐ City/County officials
- ☐ Hospitality business owners, operators and staff
- ☐ Transformation Team (i.e. steering group)
- ☐ Women's focus group

RHI staff conducted a night tour of downtown Macon to experience dining and entertainment in the evening.

## February 29-March 2, 2020 Attendance at RHI Sociable City Summit

A team of Maconites attended RHI's annual Sociable City Summit in Seattle, WA, which featured workshops, plenaries and networking opportunities. The event was attended by 209 people from 30 states/provinces, 74 cities and 130 organizations.

## March 3, 2020: Switch to a Virtual Approach

Shortly after returning from RHI's Seattle summit, states throughout the U.S. initiated lockdowns, shelter-in-place mandates and travel restrictions to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. RHI therefore postponed the next site visit to Macon and switched to a virtual consultation model using phone and video technology.

RHI staff stayed in regular contact (averaging a check-in call every two weeks) with Macon project coordinators Erin Keller and David Thompson.

## July 13-August 3, 2020 One-On-One Interviews

RHI staff Alicia Scholer and Jocelyn Kane conducted one-on-one interviews with the following perspectives to gather insights about what was working well and what needed improvement prior to the pandemic, as well as how the pandemic had impacted their industries and positions.

### BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Kendra Flowers

### COUNTY COMMISSION

Virgil Watkins

### HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Carla Coley

### HOSPITALITY

Hubble Beasley, Matrixxx Drafts, Wes Griffith, Kaitlynn Kressin

### MOBILITY

Weston Stroud

### PLANNING & ZONING

Greg Brown

### SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

Nicole Ard & Brad Wolfe

### TAX COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Tanja Battle

### **July 30, 2020 Virtual Transformation Team Meeting**

RHI staff convened the members of the Transformation Team for the first time as a group to discuss how the project would pivot its approach given the pandemic. Staff relayed findings thus far from interviews and the results of a business inventory analysis.

### **September 22, 2020 Virtual Recruitment Brainstorming Meeting**

RHI staff hosted a recruitment brainstorming meeting to review who had been invited thus far to the process and to collectively brainstorm who else should be reached out to. RHI staff also gave a mid-term update summary on findings thus far organized into RHI's core measures framework.

### **October 20, 2020 Virtual Orientation**

Local community members welcomed project participants. They discussed why the project is important to downtown Macon's future sustainability, and why people should be involved.

#### **Welcome speakers:**

- ☐ **Hubble Beasley**, General Manager, Hargray Capital Theatre
- ☐ **Kaitlynn Kressin**, Director of Marketing and Communications, JBK Southern Inc.
- ☐ **Tanja Battle**, Deputy Tax Commissioner – Business Licenses, Macon-Bibb County Tax Commissioner's Office
- ☐ **Virgil Watkins**, Commissioner – District 8 Macon-Bibb County Board of Commission

### **October 26-28, 2020 Virtual Seminars**

Three seminars were held in an interview format with RHI facilitator Alicia Scholer, then participants were invited to ask questions.

#### **October 26, 2020: Assuring Safety Seminar**

Presenter: Greg Mullen, Associate Vice President Public Safety, Clemson University and Former Police Chief, Charleston, SC; Co-Author, Public Safety and Policing Nightlife Districts

#### **October 27, 2020: Planning for People Seminar**

Presenter: Jocelyn Kane, RHI Senior Policy Advisor; Former Executive Director, San Francisco Entertainment Commission

#### **October 28, 2020: Enhancing Vibrancy Seminar**

Presenter: Cody Cowan, Founder & Executive Director, Red River Cultural District Austin, TX

### **December 7-8, 2020 Virtual Roundtables**

Three roundtables were held for each of the 3 Building Blocks of a Social Economy. Participants were asked in advance to rank proposed action items to discuss on the call.

- ☐ December 7, 2020: Planning for People Roundtable
- ☐ December 8, 2020: Assuring Safety Roundtable
- ☐ December 8, 2020: Enhancing Vibrancy Roundtable

### **2021 Virtual Leadership Summit**

A Virtual Leadership Summit will be held in 2021 to review outcomes of the project.

## APPENDIX VI: PARTICIPANTS

More than 40 individuals from the following organizations participated in one or more sessions (in person and/or virtually). Participation does not imply an endorsement of recommendations in this report, only that their input was considered in development of the recommendations.

### Project Coordination was provided by:

Erin Keller, Vice President for Development, NewTown Macon & David Thompson, Founder, Piedmont Construction Group.

**BID Board / Moonhanger Group**  
Wes Griffith, *President*

**Bike Walk Macon**  
Rachel Umana, *Executive Director*

**Business Development Services**  
Kendra Flowers, *Business and Alcohol Licensing*

**Daiquiris and More / Crave Scratch Kitchen**  
Jeremy L. Jackson, *Owner*

**DJB3**  
Kahlil Blount, *DJ*

**Fabartender Services Inc. & Entertainment Services**  
Marshall Talley, *Owner & Founder / Partner*

**Georgia Department of Public Health**  
Felicia Pearson-Powell, *Macon-Bibb County Environmental Health Manager*

**Grand Opera House**  
Joe Patti, *Executive Director*  
Nikki Vincent, *Director of Rentals and Patron Services*

**Hargray Capitol Theatre**  
Hubble Beasley, *Manager*

**JBA**  
Brandon Lawler, *Owner/Manager*

**Knight Foundation**  
Anna Richards, *Program Assistant*

**Late Night**  
Cliff Nobles

**Macon Arts Alliance**  
JR Olive, *Project Director*  
Julie Wilkerson, *Executive Director*

**Macon Bibb Board of Commissioners**  
Virgil Watkins, *Commissioner*

**Macon Bibb Parks and Beautification**  
Michael Glisson, *Director*

**Macon Bibb Planning and Zoning**  
Gregory L. Brown, *Senior Planner*

**Macon Transit Authority**  
Weston Stroud, *Transit Planner*

**Macon-Bibb County**  
Kendra Flowers, *Interim Administrative Serve Manager*

**Macon-Bibb County Health Department**  
Shondreka Webster-Reese, *Environmental Health Specialist*

**Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning Commission**  
Gregory L. Brown, *Senior Planner*

**Macon-Bibb County Tax Commissioner's Office**  
Tanja Battle, *Deputy Tax Commissioner*

**Macon-Bibb Urban Development Authority**  
Victoria Jessie, *Project Director*  
Alex Morrison, *Executive Director*

**Mercer University**  
Julia Rubens, *Director of Arts Marketing*

**Mercer University Police**  
Gary Collins, *Chief of Police*

**NewTown Macon**  
Richard Bingaman, *Operations Manager*  
Emily Hopkins, *Director of Place*  
Bethany Rogers, *Director of Business and Real Estate Development*

**Niche 385 & Recess Bar**  
Materra Drafts, *Owner*

**Ocmulgee Brewpub**  
Kaitlynn Kressin, *Director of Marketing*

**Registered and Ready**  
Ben Hubbard, *Vice President*

**The Otis Redding Foundation**  
Justin Andrews, *Director of Special Projects and Outreach*

**The Rookery / Moonhanger**  
Drew Jennings, *Manager*

**Travis Jean Emporium / DMCA**  
Scott Mitchell, *Owner*

**Triangle Arts Macon**  
Ric Geyer, *Chief Creator*

**United Way of Central GA | OneMacon!**  
Sundra Woodford, *Community Engagement Project Manager*

**Visit Macon**  
Steven Fulbright, *Director of Tourism*  
Gary Wheat, *CEO*

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