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## Downtown Master Plan

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## **Downtown Master Plan**

**Johnny Johnston**

The City of Huntsville has an impressive track record of recognizing opportunities and taking the initiative to encourage and support new and expanding businesses and industry. Having enjoyed dramatic successes in the development of aerospace and high-technology industries in the past, the City of Huntsville recognizes the importance of diversification to ensure long-term economic viability. Therefore, the City has recently completed a Downtown Master Plan which includes significant public and private initiatives designed to duplicate in the central city the development success stories found in the other portions of the community. Huntsville is now seizing the opportunity to revitalize downtown and make it a focal point in the City's economic development program.

The construction of I-565, and several new office buildings (the AmSouth Building, for example) presented a unique opportunity to combine present strengths with future possibilities. Downtown is a vital link in the economy and can share in the community's growth.



The groups involved in creating the downtown plan were: The City of Huntsville, The Department of City Planning, Downtown Steering Committee, and LDR International. In addition, The Chamber of Commerce and a local advisory committee were involved in the creation of the plan.

Downtown revitalization is a complex process involving many diverse groups and interests. Therefore, we identified several conditions of development which would be important for our master plan and redevelopment program to be successful.

### Study Area — Concentration on Downtown Core

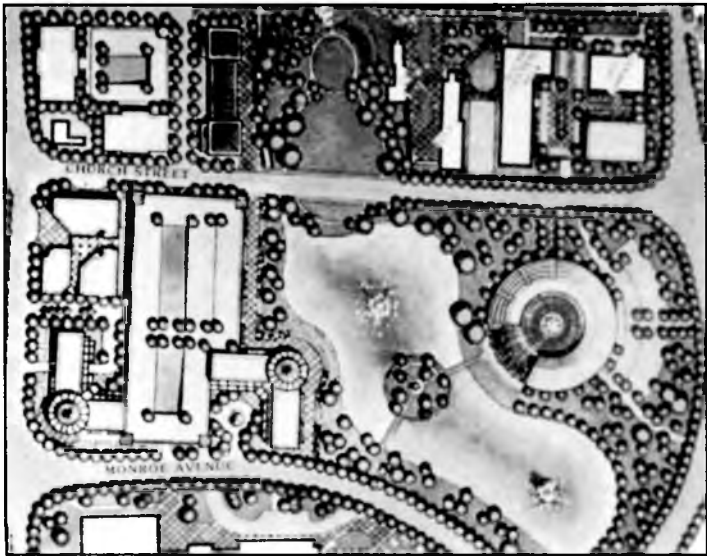
The area you see here is considered the downtown 'Core' and is bounded by Monroe Avenue on the west and the north, Lincoln Street on the east, and Williams Avenue on the south.



At the outset we established these general objectives of the Downtown Plan which are designed to create an active, attractive urban core.

Core Area Plan — Several Key Points To Focus On Within The Core Were Identified

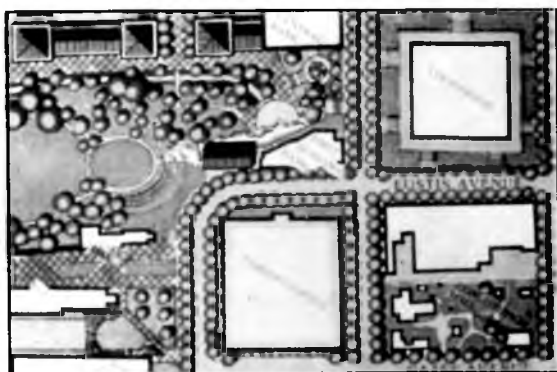
*Big Spring Park Overview* — Big Spring Park is a key downtown asset. This unique feature will be enhanced by the plan and in turn will become even more important as a downtown attraction.





*Big Spring Park Perspective* — One important goal of the plan is to make downtown a people place. Big Spring Park is a good place to start in attracting people to the downtown area.

*Courthouse Square Overview - Linkage to Park* — This shows the eastern side of Big Spring Park and the western side of Courthouse Square. The renovation of Big Spring Park will allow easier access into the park creating a linkage from the Courthouse Square area to Big Spring Park, Big Spring Lagoon, and the VBCC.





*Constitution Hall Village* — The Village is a key downtown attraction that will also benefit from this linkage of the Courthouse Square Area to Big Spring Park, Big Spring Lagoon, and the VBCC. By creating a pedestrian oriented downtown, access to the various attractions will be easier.



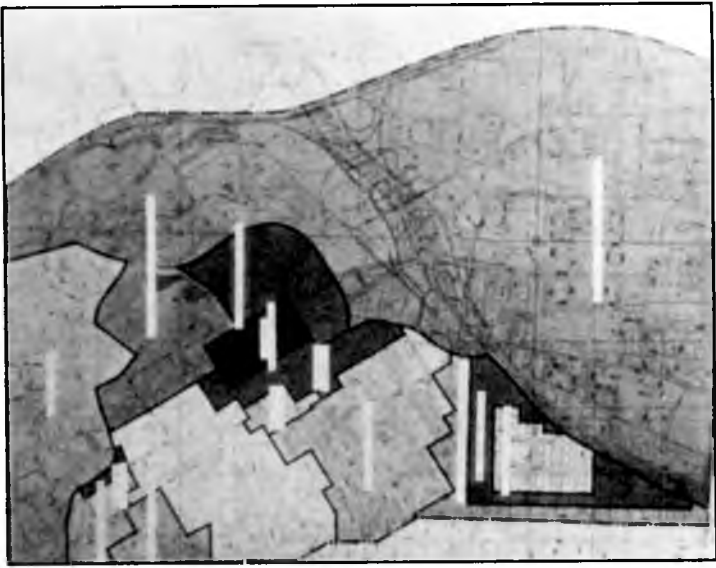
The office/residential development planned for the area east of the Courthouse is a quality development that forms a transitional area from downtown to the Historic Twickenham District.

Land use and zoning are key tools in the downtown plan implementation. The proposed land use for the downtown area emphasizes mixed use, and includes commercial, governmental, and residential uses in the core. This reflects the opportunities and growth potential in this area created by the construction of I-565.

The current zoning for this area is inappropriate for guiding the quality of new growth. The large amount of industrial zoning is not conducive to the type of development desired for this area.

The proposed zoning for this area provides the diversity, guided growth, and the emphasis on the residential and Medical districts required for the downtown plan to be successful.

The land use and zoning changes are essential components needed to create a healthy, vital city center. Another essential element is an emphasis on good urban design.



Our urban design plan includes the following objectives.

The first objective is to create a sense of place. The Big Spring is historic, esthetic, and familiar to the people of Huntsville. The renovation of Big Spring Park is an important step in the downtown plan.







The second objective is to create an environment for people. The Big Spring Park Plan, together with the linkage it will create from the VBCC to the Courthouse Square area, should make downtown Huntsville a “people place.”

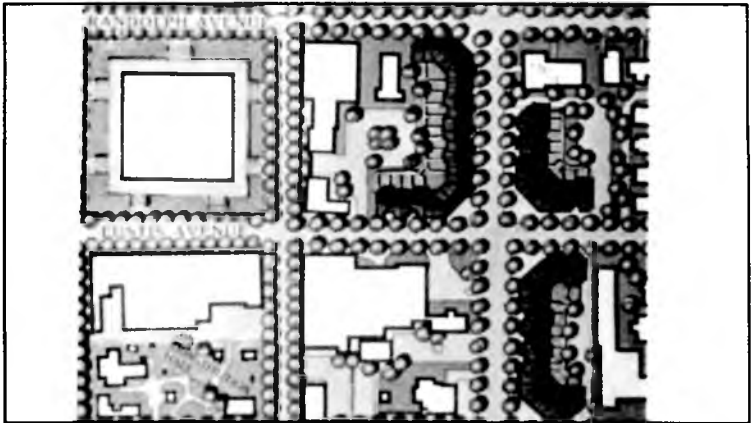
The third objective is to create a special shopping place. This opportunity is based on the projected increased employment and housing that will be added to the downtown area. Downtown streetscape improvements will also enhance the potential for new specialty retail ventures downtown.





The fourth objective is to provide transit in the downtown area to provide the needed access and linkages to the various attractions. This transit system includes the Huntsville Depot Transportation Museum trolley and the new shuttle system. This system will aid not only the residents of Huntsville, but tourists as well.

The fifth objective is the creation of housing opportunities. Areas of housing are proposed east of Courthouse Square.



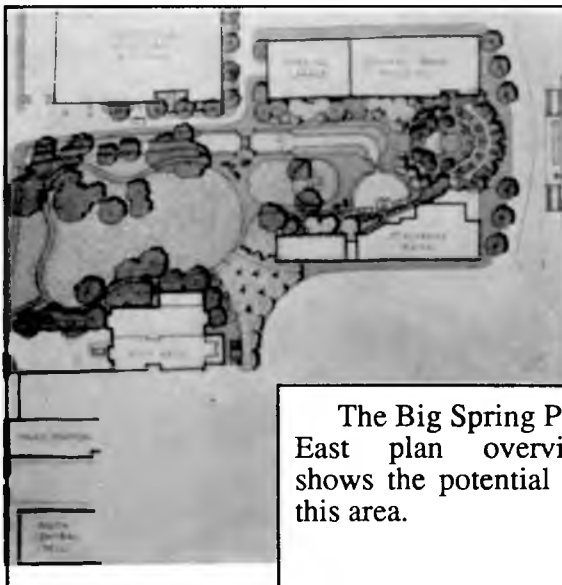


The type of housing you see here is an efficient use of urban space. The housing is of high quality and will be desirable to the growing professional population downtown.

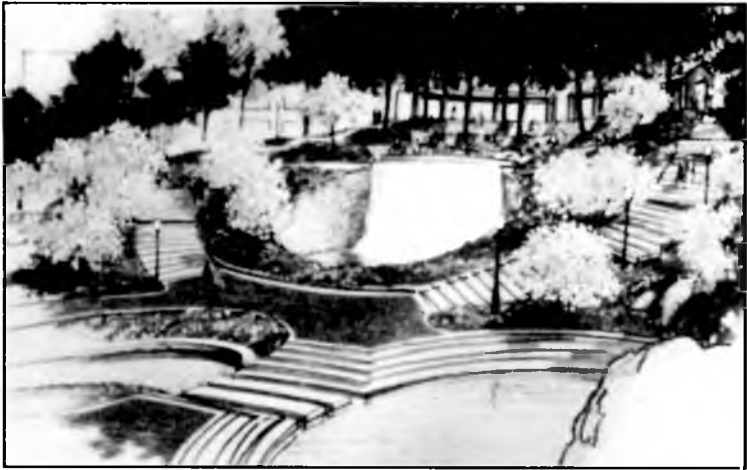




While all of these objectives are attractive, we have to make the transition from what we have now to what we want to be. Efforts such as the closing of the oversized Spragins Street are representative of the steps required to make these ideas reality.



The Big Spring Park East plan overview shows the potential for this area.



*Waterfall - Big Spring Park East* — The dedication of the City of Huntsville to encourage and enhance downtown development is evident in the Big Spring Park renovation project. Shown here is the proposed waterfall for the east side of the park. An amphitheater, which will provide an area for lunch time and weekend events, has been incorporated into the design.

*Potential of Canal - Pedestrian Linkage* — There is great potential for the canals in downtown. The canals can become a valuable asset as attractive waterways that serve as a pedestrian linkage from downtown to the VBCC.





Not only can the canals serve as a pedestrian linkage from downtown to the VBCC, but they can also provide a scenic walkway for shops and cafes that could locate in the opportunity areas along the canal.

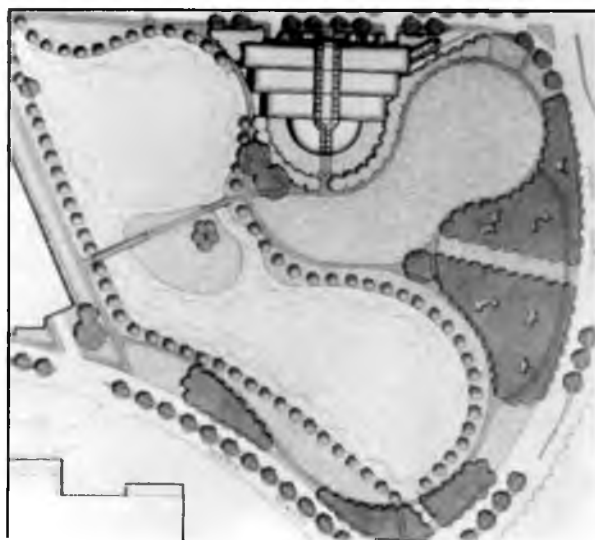
The parking deck located adjacent to Big Spring Park provides an excellent opportunity site. This is the parking deck as it appears now.





This is the potential of the parking deck with the bottom floor converted to attractive retail or public uses.

The plan for improvements to the west side of Big Spring Park includes the opening up of the lagoon by creating an is-





land and adding another bridge improving the visibility of the size of the lagoon from one side of the park to the other. The Huntsville Museum of Art and the Arts Council will each have their facilities located adjacent to the park and will further enhance the park as a people place.

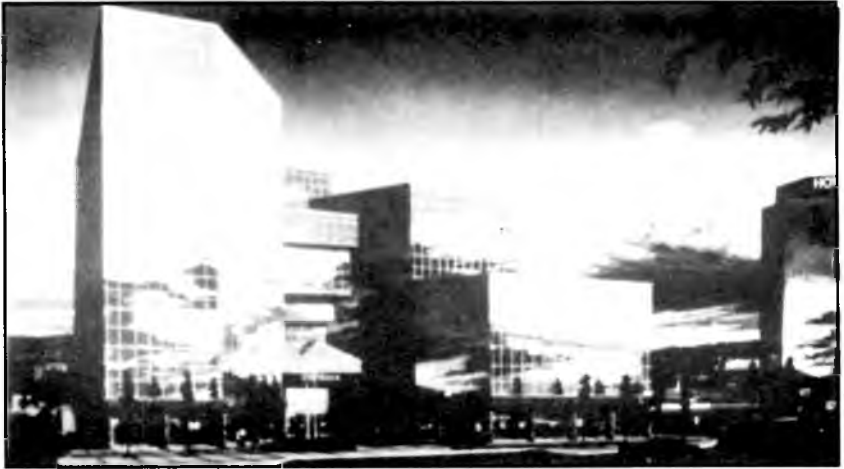
The Von Braun Civic Center is an economic force in the downtown area. The VBCC Master Plan calls for the expansion of the facility. This will allow the VBCC to become a major conference center and will bring even more people to the downtown area. The linkage created from the VBCC to Big Spring Park to the Courthouse Square will benefit all of downtown.



The renovation of the Municipal Building formed the core of a downtown governmental center. Almost all of the departments of the City are housed in this building. This type of use fits in well with the Downtown Master Plan.



The first phase of the Civic Plaza has been completed. The projected complex you see here will include additional office space and a hotel.



*AmSouth Building*  
— The recently completed AmSouth Building, an example of the quality of development desired for downtown, represents the confidence of the private sector in locating downtown.





*Huntsville Hospital* — As the Medical District continues to grow and expand, this element of the downtown area economy becomes increasingly important.

*Humana Hospital* — Recognizing this valuable asset, a master plan for the Medical District is being created that will meet the needs of the Medical District, ensure the quality of future growth, and guide development in a way that complements the downtown area.





*View of Big Spring Park / Skyline* — The view you see here is not unrealistic. The skyline consists of buildings that already exist or that will be constructed soon.

Publicly funded projects such as the arts centers and park improvements help to establish a positive image and market identity for the area. In addition, these improvements serve as a powerful catalyst for new private investment such as the AmSouth Bank and Civic Plaza projects.

With the cooperation of the public and private sectors, downtown Huntsville will become a more successful, inviting, people-oriented place.

*Johnny Johnston came to Huntsville Downtown Redevelopment Authority (HDRA) as its first director in March 1991. He is a native of Huntsville, Alabama, who started his career with the Huntsville Air Service. He was with Eastern Airlines for 32 years, having lived in 8 different cities.*

*During his Huntsville years, Johnny has been a member of the Madison County Tourism Board, Charter President of the Rotary Club of Greater Huntsville, and Vice President of the Redstone Riders Motorcycle Civic Association.*