DOUBLE SPRINGS

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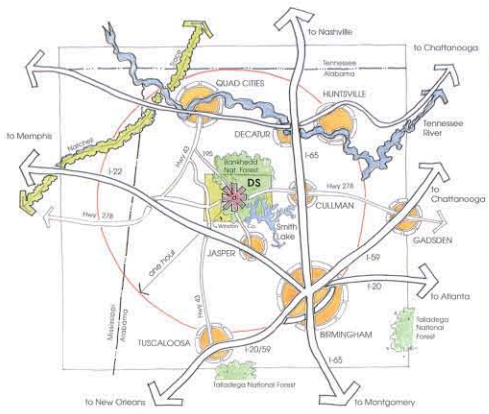
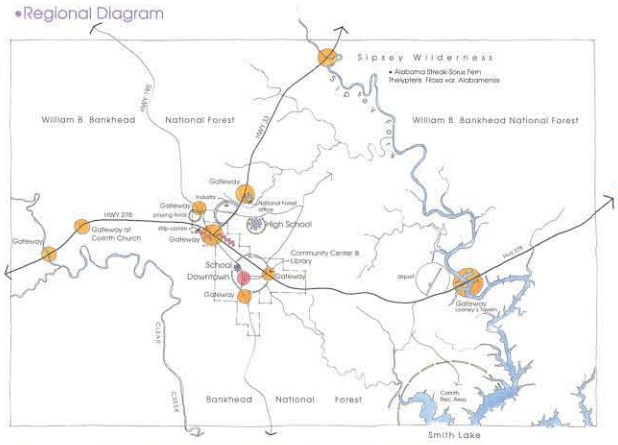


• Double Springs is the Gateway to the Sipsey Wilderness, the Bankhead National Forest and some of Alabama's most extraordinary flora, fauna and scenic beauty. Nearby Smith Lake, the Tennessee River and proximity to the state's major population center position Double Springs to capture many benefits of the emerging eco and recreational tourism industries.

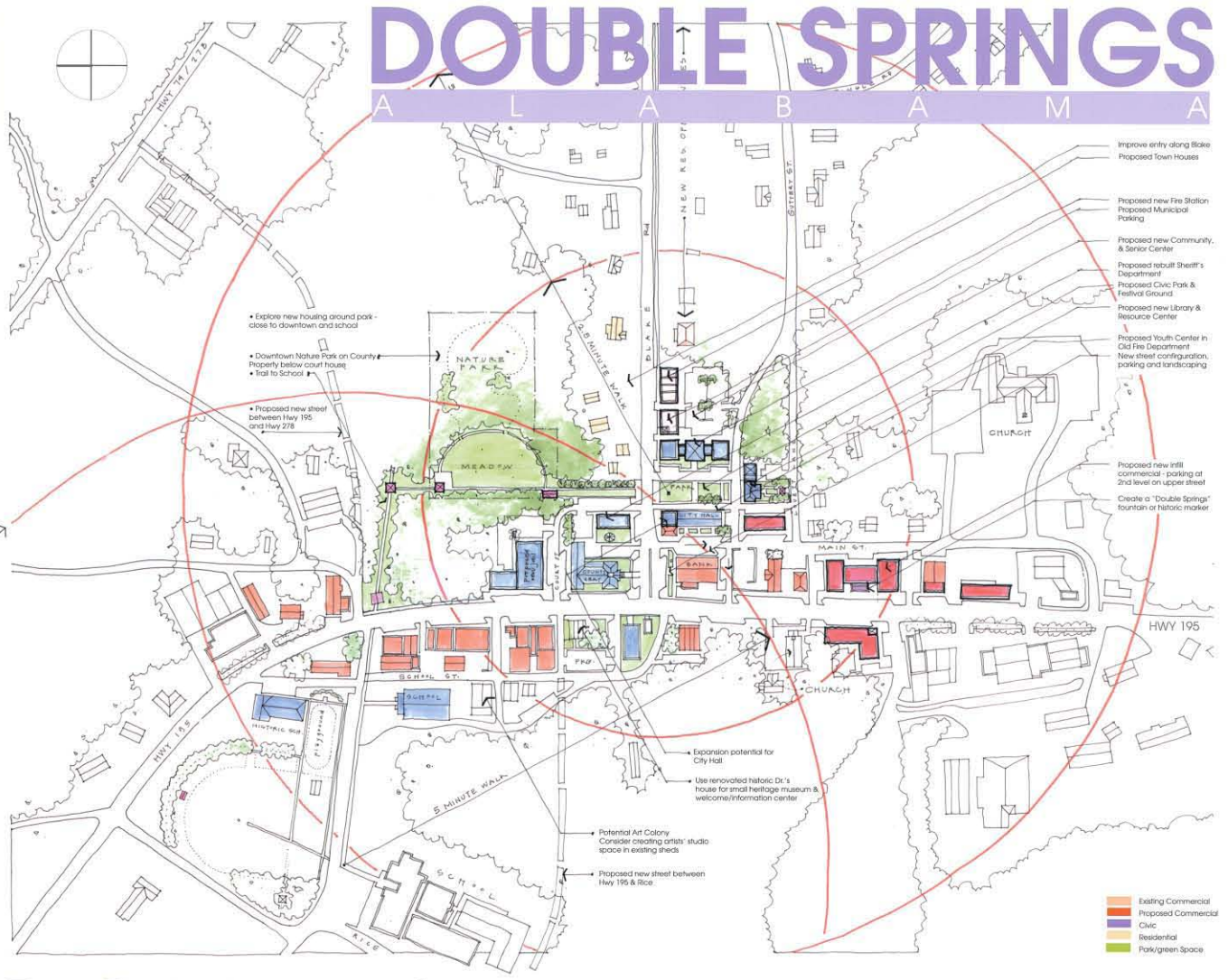
•Regional Diagram



•Diagram of Proximity to the Sipsey Wilderness & Bankhead National Forest

•History

Double Springs has an exceptionally rich history. County seat to Winston County, this part of Alabama formed the "Free State of Winston" during the Civil War, refusing to side with either the Union or the Confederacy. This spirit of independence and sense of control over destiny and future are still evident. The community is also a birthplace of shape note singing and home of Looney's Tavern - an outpost on Smith Lake that hosts an enactment of the area's colorful history. Today, this community is seeking to position itself to capture the potential of its special place in history and its location in one of the most significant and bio-diverse areas of the state. Auburn's Urban Studio began work with the community in the Spring of 2005 as part of an Appalachian Regional Commission Flex-E Grant program. The enthusiasm and energy we found in Double Springs are strong signals of a can-do-spirit and the local pride of place that are fundamental to the success of the proposals and concepts illustrated here. We challenge the community to move forward with confidence and conviction as they seek out resources, partners and the potential of this great place in Alabama.



DOWNTOWN PROPOSAL

Small Town Design Initiative

Auburn University
Center for Architecture & Urban Studies
Birmingham, AL

Summer/Fall 2005

•Assets & Opportunities

• Capitalize on Double Springs' excellent location
- Capture the potential as a trail-head for the Bankhead National Forest, the Sipsey Wilderness and your proximity to Smith Lake
- Capture the opportunities associated with the natural beauty and character of this area
- Seek out appropriate light industry and assembly related to your existing plants, forestry products and local recreational opportunities - recruit businesses that create "value added"

• Celebrate Double Springs' Strong Small Town Character & Exceptional History in Winston Co.
- Promote Double Springs' sense of community, friendliness and safety
- Create a Welcome Center and Small Museum in the downtown
- Protect and preserve your small town character
- Recruit families, businesses and visitors seeking out a "small town"
- Promote and strengthen/invest in your strong schools
- Promote your heritage and history with local festivals, events and celebrations

• Expand the possibilities of a vigorous Downtown
- Make downtown a destination for your citizens and visitors alike
- Create a strong plan for supporting existing businesses and for increased retail/commercial
- Create a downtown center and park to provide activities that attract your citizens of all ages - but particularly teens and retirees - to the downtown
- Create downtown buildings with character that reinforces the historic courthouse and provide distinctive places for niche businesses apart from the strip development along Highway 278
- Create guidelines for new construction in the downtown that respects the scale and massing of your historic buildings
- Create guidelines and incentive programs for restoration of historic buildings and new signage
- Recruit new niche and synergistic businesses to the downtown; promote and market downtown
- Make downtown pedestrian friendly
- Consider the creation of a Community Development Corporation or similar non-profit to advance projects that will serve the best interest of Double Springs
- Encourage strong public/private partnerships
- Promote strong partnerships across the region for the development of shared services and facilities, mutual support of tourism and business development

• Strengthen and Protect the Gateways to your Community
- Make good impressions - make Double Springs distinct and memorable
- Encourage visitors to come downtown with signage that directs them along Blake Road
- Invest in redevelopment along Blake Road - housing reinvestment, new sidewalks, trees, lighting and interpretive signage
- Make Highway 195 a parkway, not a "strip," with trees, good signage and reduced curb cuts
- Use landscaping and fencing to make the industry along Highway 33 a good gateway to the Bankhead and Sipsey
- Improve the southern gateway at Highway 195 and Highway 278 - landscape, lights and signs; make downtown easy to find

• Encourage Good New Housing and Neighborhoods
- Plan for limited, close-in new housing growth
- Encourage housing development that preserves the natural beauty and character that defines this part of north central Alabama
- Develop neighborhoods with a variety of housing sizes and price ranges to encourage diversity, a mix of ages, occupations and aspirations as well as the ability to stay in one neighborhood from starter house to retirement
- Encourage neighborhoods rather than isolated cul-de-sac subdivisions
- Discourage (or prohibit) single outlet developments - they increase traffic congestion, problems for fire and police, and limit a sense of commitment to the larger community
- Connect all new developments with roads, sidewalks and bike-ways - make them walk-able - particularly to nearby schools
- Carefully consider extensions of the city limits to include new neighborhoods - but always encourage new development first within the existing infrastructure and within existing police and fire protection areas

• Connect your schools to neighborhoods and recreation
- Preserve the relationship between your elementary school and the downtown - this is the historic home of your schools and schools add vitality to a downtown
- Plan green-ways, trails and sidewalks to connect your schools particularly to the downtown

• Promote Double Springs as a good place to retire
- Create good housing - in context with the downtown that is targeted to families who are down sizing and seeking out homes with less size, yard and maintenance (these houses are also great for young families !)
- Provide good social and recreational activities and programs for retirees
- Provide good local medical access; build a strong relationship with regional medical providers
- Get retirees involved in the community by seeking out their commitment to tutoring programs, festivals, the local welcome center/museum and as a strong customer base for downtown eateries, coffee shops and businesses

• Create a downtown civic park, a nature park and a strong system of pedestrian connections
- Create a good public park and civic park in the downtown
- Connect your neighborhoods, schools, parks and downtown with a system of sidewalks, greenways, bikeways and trails

• Create a plan for Highway 278
- Work to encourage better building patterns along Highway 278 - that is: make it a parkway rather than a strip as it passes through Double Springs
- Concentrate pockets of commercial rather than scattering them along the entire length of the highway - this provides synergy between businesses, creates safer movement on the highway and preserves the beauty and character of place
- Create guidelines for development
- Work with ALDOT to create a strong landscaping and tree planting program along the route

• Build for a Sustainable Future
- Promote new construction - retail/commercial, civic and residential - that is of the highest quality, energy efficient and consistent with the principles of sustainability
- Be a leader in the preservation/protection of the flora and fauna of the region - your distinctive place in the world depends on preserving and celebrating this marvelous asset !

•CONCEPTS

• Make Downtown a Destination - a Place to Linger and Enjoy

Double Springs' historic downtown hugs a ridge of the Appalachians with the Winston County courthouse at one of the highest points in the downtown. The dignity and beauty of the court-house speaks to the pride and values of the area's founding fathers, but many of the subsequent buildings that have grown up along the town's tight network of streets do not create a place that invites citizens or visitors to linger, walk and spend time - or money. A downtown that is more than a place to pass through can encourage business prosperity and create a destination for the region. This proposal recommends three concepts to encourage this potential.

One - create a civic park and festival opportunity in the downtown.
The land east of city hall is currently used for parking and city maintenance. This site is well located for a civic park and can become the center piece for a new downtown civic area that can give citizens of all ages and incomes a "reason to come downtown" with the addition of a community and senior center, a relocation of the library to the downtown and with a youth center in the old fire station below city hall. Each of the facilities can host a variety of activities from club meetings and classes, to class reunions, receptions and family reunions. When citizens spend time downtown for social reasons they are more likely to support cafes, specialty shops and entertainment venues. As these kind of retail/commercial businesses become established in the downtown it is more likely that visitors, tourists, hikers and those passing through along Highway 278 will have a reason to come into the downtown and spend time and money.

Two - make downtown pedestrian friendly and green.
Currently, downtown is not an easy place to get around - even in a car, but - particularly so as a pedestrian. Downtowns that thrive are pedestrian friendly with good, well-lit sidewalks that create safe, beautiful places to walk between businesses. This plan proposes a change in street patterns along Main Street and in front of the bank to the south of the court house. If Main Street becomes one-way south, there is sufficient right-of-way for parallel parking adjacent to the bank and in front of city hall. With this change of parking the area in front of the bank can become a green "extension" of the courthouse green and the area in front of city hall can be planted with flowers and shrubbery making for much more beautiful front doors to city hall, the courthouse, the bank and the entire downtown.

In addition, there is a proposed extension of the commercial sidewalk network from the elementary school into a nature park on land-locked county property east of the court house and then turning south to connect back to the new civic park and community meeting and recreation facilities. The nature park can give downtown a "micro" wilderness that literally and symbolically connects to the larger landscape of the region. The schools can use the area for hands-on learning experiences, recreation and this area also offers expanded potential for downtown festivals and events.

Three - create new gateways into the downtown - make downtown easy to find and easy to use. Downtown should be easy to find, particularly for those traveling along Federal Highway 278 and those coming and going from Smith Lake, the Sipsey Wilderness or the Bankhead Forest. In addition to good signage and graphics that welcome visitors and show distances and the businesses - particularly eateries - in the downtown, a new entry to downtown should be developed along Blake Drive. This is the most direct route from Highway 278 and with higher visibility there will be both a need and an incentive to redevelop this street with new housing, better lighting, sidewalks and signage. Blake also represents the best long-term potential for expanded commercial capacity in the downtown.

Create a welcome center and small heritage museum in the old Dr. Blake house on Highway 195 at end of Blake Drive. This important historic home is in an excellent location to serve the needs of visitors and locals who need to know "what's going on in town," how to find it and why Double Springs is a great place.

• Reinforce your status as the Gateway to the Sipsey Wilderness and the Bankhead National Forest

Double Springs has an exceptional opportunity to become the "trail head" for everyone visiting the recreational and natural attractions of this area. Work with the Parks Service to partner in providing information not just at their offices, but also in the downtown. Recruit businesses that have specialty services targeted to bicyclers, hikers, canoers, hurters/fishermen, birders and outdoor enthusiasts of all sorts. Create good lodging, eateries and entertainment that serves the needs of these residents and visitors and work to expand the range of seasons when visitors are attracted to the area.

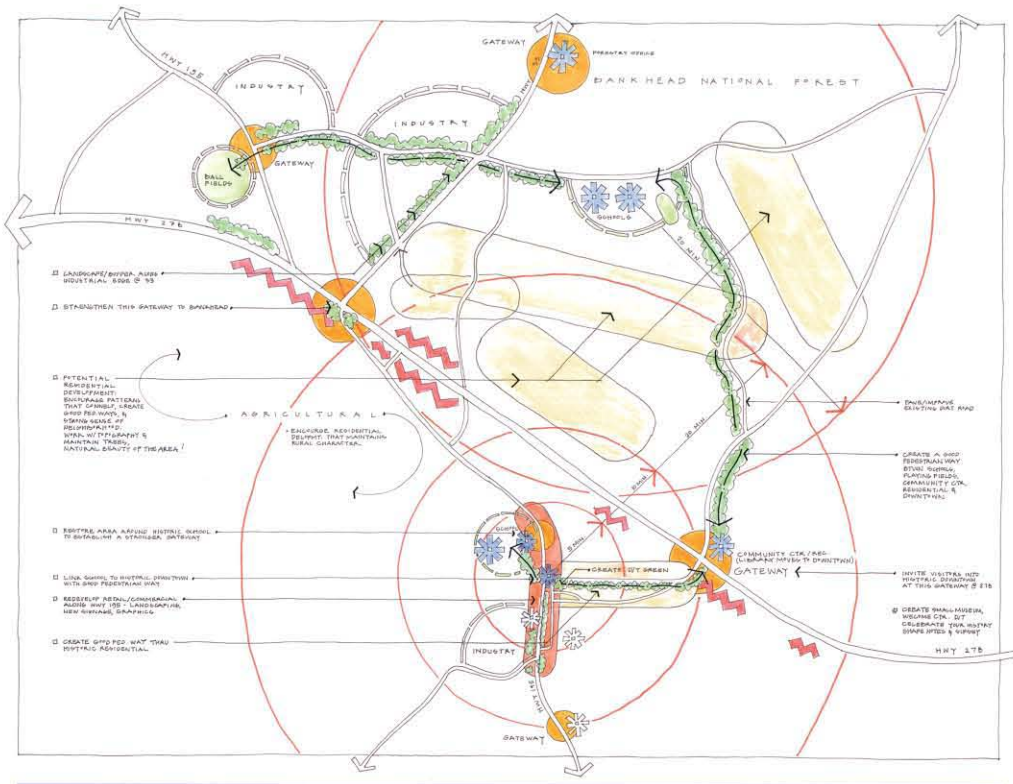
As the gateway to some of Alabama's most spectacular scenic beauty, it is important to take special care to make the retail commercial service area along Highway 278 more than a typical "strip." Create a lighting, landscaping and signage program that makes this part of Highway 278 a parkway - not a strip highway. The impressions you make with this transformation will literally "stop people" enroute and encourage them to do business in your community.

• Create a Network of Connectivity throughout the Community

This plan recommends a network of greenways, sidewalks and trails that can connect the town's schools, neighborhoods - and potential neighborhoods, businesses, recreation, and downtown. Good trails, bike-ways, and sidewalks can create a connectivity in communities that contributes to reduced automobile trips, increased exercise, better health and a stronger sense of community as well as increased retail sales in the downtown. While the terrain is challenging in Double Springs, the walking distances are modest. One potential network - illustrated in the Concept Diagram above right - also shows several areas of possible new housing that would be in easy walking distance of your schools, recreation area, jobs and downtown. This type of residential area - connected with a grid of streets, sidewalks and neighborhood parks to a larger network of pedestrian and bikeways - are particularly attractive to young families and retirees.

• Promote Double Springs as a Good Place to Retire

Small towns like Double Springs that have excellent access to scenic beauty, recreational areas like Smith Lake, Bankhead National Forest and the Sipsey Wilderness, and with charm, safety and sense of community are well positioned to attract the growing market of people looking for a good place to retire. New housing that provides easy maintenance and upkeep as well as proximity to downtown, services, medical facilities and programs are key to attracting this group of active seniors with disposable time and resources.



Concepts Diagram

•Strategies for Advancement

Successful communities move forward with a "can-do" attitude. But it is also important to have strategies for expanding capacity and harnessing the potential of a strong and active volunteer community work force. There is a need for both a strong public will and strong public/private partnerships to realize the concepts of the development/revitalization plan. This proposal recommends the creation of a Community Development Corporation (CDC) to provide a mechanism for pro-active engagement and advancement of the proposals of this plan. As a non-profit, a CDC can work - like a developer - but in the interest of the citizens of Double Springs to move forward projects, buy and sell properties, administer and receive grants and initiate development that must be championed outside the private sector. A CDC can provide on-the-ground capacity as well as promote the downtown, recruit new businesses and market the potential of Double Springs. It can also be the orchestrator of your local volunteer community.

In addition, the community should begin immediate efforts to: • secure funds from USDA for a new fire station; • restore the old Blake home and office for a welcome center and heritage museum; and • create a beautification program for Highway 278 through Double Springs. Near-term, you should begin to: • relocate city municipal service yard to an area of lower visibility so that the site below city hall can be transformed into a civic park; • negotiate access to adjacent properties as site for the proposed community center and library; • work with the county to gain access and use of their landlocked property behind the courthouse for a nature park. • Initiate regional strategies for promoting and marketing the entire area as a tourist destination and as a good place to retire.

Mid-term: • secure enhancement funds for the improved traffic pattern, parking and planting proposals around city hall, the county courthouse and bank; • create a development plan for reinvestment and improvements along Blake; • recruit housing developers and encourage the development of neighborhoods versus cul-de-sac subdivisions.

Acknowledgments

This plan was accomplished under the auspices of an Appalachian Regional Planning Commission Flex-E Grant. The strength of the proposal was made possible by strong community support and the enthusiasm of Mayor John Berry, City Clerk, Kim Ownby and the city council. We would like to also acknowledge the support of the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development and Director Nisa Miranda; and Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments, Keith Jones, Director and Ben Farmer. The plan was prepared by Auburn Urban Studio Director and Gresham Professor, Cheryl Morgan, AIA with help from recent MLA Auburn graduate Britton Jones.

• View of Blake Street looking South toward proposed new Fire Station, Community Center, Festival Park and Library

• Renovate Dr. Blake's Office for Welcome Center & Heritage Museum

• View along Highway 195 looking West toward proposed new Welcome Center, Heritage Museum and revitalization possibilities for existing Historic Buildings