Riverfront Vision
City of Hawkinsville, GA
Project Data Sheet

**Project Name:** City of Hawkinsville Riverfront Project

**Location:** Hawkinsville, GA

**Description:** The City of Hawkinsville is in need of design ideas for the boat landing/ dock area along the riverfront that will eventually be connected via boardwalk to the county-owned landing approximately one mile down river. The plan should also include suggestions for an adjacent 3-acre property that is to be donated to the city for public use as part of the riverfront project. The design proposal should be cohesive with the existing master plan for the county portion of the site.

**Archway Contact:** Denis Epps

University of Georgia, Hoke Smith Building, Athens, GA 30602

**Community Contacts:** Mary Beth Bass

Archway Professional

**Date of Initial Site Visit:** 09.11.2009

**Students Assigned:** Hazel Lewis

Gwen Wolfgang

**Final Products:** Master Plan and sketches of proposed improvements for the landing dock site as well as the additional 3-acre property that is to be donated to the city. Report also includes recommendations for appropriate site furnishings.

**Date Delivered:** 10.30.2009
Meeting with the Clients

During our initial site visit, we were able to meet with several representatives from the community including the Pulaski County Commissioner, members of the Rotary Club, a representative from Rivers Alive and Hawkinsville Dispatch and News, representatives of the River Park Advisory Council as well as representatives from the Middle Georgia Regional Commission and the Better Home Town program. Along with the local Archway Professional, this diverse group provided us with substantial information concerning ongoing efforts to revitalize the riverfront as well as ideas for future development. The discussion among community members revealed a deep-rooted interest in the Uchee-Shoals boat landing as a possible tourist attraction for participants in the annual Paddle Georgia event.

Ocmulgee River Corridor Master Plan

The Pulaski County master plan outlines the community’s vision for the Hawkinsville boat landing. The report notes that the current condition of the site is poor with minimal landscaping and no built structures. The boat landing also requires a great deal of work and the city would like to see it replaced rather than refurbished. The City of Hawkinsville envisions the boat landing as an eco-friendly venue that encompasses:

- Safe public access to the Ocmulgee River for kayaks, canoes, etc.
- A welcome center, museum, and/or outfitting location for visitors
- Quality landscaping and structures that facilitate community activities e.g. picnics
- Northern terminus of the river walk via a boardwalk/raised walkway to provide access from the City Boat Landing to the Veterans Park

The boat landing is a vital component in the success of the Ocmulgee Greenway Corridor and will also play a part in boosting downtown revitalization and economic development efforts.
The Uchee Shoals Boat Landing site is located at the head of a two-mile trail that runs along the Ocmulgee River. The trail connects the landing to the Veterans Park, Cotton Mill Lofts and the Pulaski County Riverfront Park.

Above: Cotton Mill Lofts

Above: Veterans Park

Above and Left: Digitally altered version of the Proposed Corridor - Riverfront Trail and Pulaski County Riverfront Park Concept Plan prepared by the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program with assistance from Middle Georgia Regional Development Center
Site Analysis

The existing boat landing site boasts spectacular views of the Ocmulgee River as it flows under the Golden Isles Parkway (Hwy 341). Historically this was the only point at which the river could be crossed, hence the reason for the growth of Hawkinsville as a city. Approximately 1.14 acres in size, the site is located in close proximity to downtown, Veterans Park, and the Cotton Mill Loft development. Plans to acquire additional riverfront property on an adjacent site will increase the total area to approximately 4.1 acres.

Above: Panoramic of the river view from the boat landing.

Boat Landing

The existing concrete landing is unattractive and in a state of disrepair; most likely due to frequent inundation. The City would like to see new infrastructure in its place.

Shoreline

At present the shoreline has a crude appearance. There is no clear definition as to where the dock ends and the riverbed begins. Although the banks are partially covered with grass, there is a need for greater stabilization of the soil.

Soil Conditions

Due to water-logging the existing ground cover is unable to maintain total coverage of the site leaving patches of exposed dirt; there also seemed to be sandy soil introduced to the site.
Adjacent Property

There are several opportunities for increased interaction with the water along the edge of the adjacent parcel. Natural clearings in the woods provide spaces for seating areas, picnic tables, or places for quiet contemplation. Additionally, the presence of a small creek presents opportunities for fishing piers and pedestrian bridges that allow access to the smaller islands.

Gas Station Site

The abandoned gas station is ideally situated for reuse as a visitor’s center and main entrance into the landing dock facility. From the vantage point on the hill, there are sweeping views into the site below as well as a visual connection to the Veteran’s Park across the street. Due to its former use, there is a need for mitigation of the site and removal of underground fuel tanks prior to development. However, the potential of the site as a gateway to the city landing is tremendous, and the expense of remediation will be well worth it. Though there are immediate budget constraints, the city should seize the opportunity to acquire this property to preempt any development that might hinder the intended function of the site.

Other Considerations

Existing erosion and infrastructure damage is attributable to recurrent flooding of the site during heavy rains. Community representatives estimated that water levels have reached as high as thirty feet in previous years. Thus any new infrastructure, site furnishings, and other landscape amenities must be able to withstand inundation. Also, the site should be designed in such a way that in the event of flooding, some portions of the site are still usable by visitors.
Design Inspiration

During the initial meeting with community stakeholders, several suggestions were offered as to the aesthetic that residents would like to see evidenced at the Uchee Shoals landing. The sample pictures below were provided by the local Archway Professional.
Site Program

Based on issues identified in the site analysis, we recommend the following improvements for the Uchee Shoals Landing site:

A. Visitors Center
   • Repurpose abandoned gas station building

B. Parking
   • Establish designated parking close to Visitors Center
   • Propose additional parking for future expansion

C. Boat Landing
   • Demolish existing landing (crushed concrete should be reused as fill for new road or construction of additional parking lot)
   • Realign new roadway to connect with proposed Visitors Center

D. Terraces / Decking
   • Distribute three levels distributed along the hillside to facilitate use after periods of heavy rainfall
   • Deck structure should accommodate existing trees
   • Provide picnic and seating facilities
   • Provide opportunities for ‘lookouts’ from Visitors Center to boat landing

E. Soil erosion and bank stabilization
   • Introduce aggressive ground cover to protect eroded spots
   • Restore the shoreline restoration plantings recommended for additional bank stability

F. Boardwalk and Fishing Piers
   • Create raised wooden platform to protect tree roots (approx. 5–6 feet in width)
   • Install two piers proposed along riverbank (minimum width 10 feet)

G. Connection to Veterans Memorial
   • Develop two possible connections to allow for a change in water levels
   • Provide one connection via boardwalk below Golden Isles Parkway
   • Provide a second connection at street level via a proposed pedestrian crossing
The proposed master plan is presented with options for the use of wooden decking structures or stone-edged terraces. Both plans address the same needs but will differ in terms of construction and associated costs. Plan A (shown below) proposes three wooden decking structures connected by a series of ramps and stairs. The main deck is positioned at street level for easy access from the visitors center and parking lot and is intended to function as the central gathering space providing amenities for picnics and general seating.

The middle tier can also accommodate seating while the lowest deck is intended to function as an overlook for sightseeing (since it is most likely to be inundated after heavy rain events). Circulation on site has also been reorganized so that people are funneled pass the visitors center before entering the site.
Vehicular circulation has been altered from its previous location so that it does not bisect the park, and allows more usable recreational space for visitors; rerouting the path also creates a more visually interesting drive down to the river bank level for automobile drivers. Pedestrians also enter the site at the Visitor Center and then proceed to the main level deck, from which they can access the rest of the site. Additionally, the boardwalk path through the wooded section of the site, provides visitors with exploration and fishing opportunities at the inland creek as well as fishing piers along the river bank. The wooded trail, shown on the master plan as a dashed line, is intended to give a general idea as to possible circulation pattern; the actual pathway can be altered to showcase specimen trees, water features, or any other points of interest on the site.

Master Plan Options

Plan B features similar amenities but instead proposes a series of tiered stone-edged terraces instead of decks. This option lends a more natural feel to the site and establishes a system that will help to control soil erosion. However it should be noted that a lawn covered site entails higher maintenance and will not be able to accommodate pedestrian activities after a rain event due to the fact that the site will be muddy and more susceptible to structural and vegetation damage.
The introduction of stone terraces also entails the removal of some existing trees that will need to be replanted once the terraces are built; inevitably incurring additional cost. However, this is an opportunity to replant appropriate trees on the site (species that respond better to both wet and dry conditions) in areas that will enhance and not ‘divide’ pedestrian spaces.

A series of stone steps and ramps will serve as connectors between the various levels. Terrace edges also allow for flexibility of use on the site since edges can also double as amphitheatre-style seating for major events such as Paddle Georgia. The material and finish choices (e.g. poured concrete, dry-stacked stone or masonry stone) for the edges will determine the overall aesthetic of the site; formal versus informal, etc.

**Above and left:**
Terrace edges can have varying aesthetic appeals; some are more formal while others are very rugged-looking and lend a more natural feel to the site.
Visitor Center and Parking

The desire for a Visitor Center at Uchee Shoals landing was clearly expressed in the Ocmulgee River Corridor Master Plan and subsequently confirmed at the meeting with local community representatives. Based on observations made during the initial site visit, we felt that the abandoned gas station at the peak of the hillside showed the greatest potential as a possible site for such a use. Due to its prominent location and proximity to the boat landing, the gas station building has some of best views of the site and riverway below, as well as the Golden Isles Parkway. Thus we propose reuse and repurposing of the existing building to serve as the new Visitor Center.

Above: Modifications to the existing shell can facilitate installation of south-facing windows to take advantage of natural lighting.

The proposed parking lot should be screened using vegetation and make use of bio-swales to ensure that excess runoff during rain events is controlled. Use of porous asphalt in the parking lot and permeable pavement around the building can also help to control stormwater runoff.

Above: Curb cuts allow water to flow freely from paved surfaces into landscaped areas. Left: Bio-swale buffer divides vehicle parking and pedestrian walkway.
Boat Landing

According to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), boat ramps should have slopes of twelve to fifteen percent. Ramps 16 feet in width are recommended for the general public though many existing 12-foot ramps have proven to be satisfactory at low-use facilities. The department also advises that ramps placed in flowing rivers should enter the river at an angle downstream in order to reduce the sideward push on boats being placed on or off trailers; angled ramps also accumulate less silt after a period of high water. Stabilized ditches on either side of the ramp can also help to handle runoff during heavy rains.

Recommendations for installation of concrete ramps are as follows:
Slab should be at least six inches thick and finished with a surface rough enough to provide good traction, even when covered with algae; the DGIF has recently converted to a "V" groove finish for improved traction. For ramps accommodating boats over twenty feet or where heavy equipment might be launched, thicker concrete, larger steel and/or stronger concrete are recommended.

Above: Pre-cast slabs is sometimes used as an alternative to poured concrete in the construction of boat landings. These can be particularly useful in constructing the underwater section of the ramp.

Master Plan A proposed a three-tier deck system for the site, allowing for different levels of use during periods of high-water; lower levels may be submerged, but the street-level tier will still be usable. The decks are supported by piers driven into the hillside for greater stabilization and access is provided via a series of ramps and stairs.

Master Plan B alternatively proposes a series of terraces supported by stone walls designed to help control erosion as well as function as gathering spaces for visitors; tiers will be created using fill brought in from another site. One disadvantage of this option will be low usability after heavy rain events as terraces will be muddy and unable to tolerate heavy foot-traffic without damaging turf health.
Shoreline Restoration

Portions of the Ocmulgee River shoreline are showing signs of erosion most likely due to intermittent inundation and unsuitable groundcover treatment. Restoration of the shoreline is imperative as it serves as a bridge between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. A healthy riparian corridor is also crucial to protecting water quality and maintaining wildlife habitat. Banks can be stabilized using a variety of methods including (a) use of hardened structures e.g. bulkheads, stone revetments, seawalls; (b) use of natural structures i.e. a “Living Shorelines” approach; and (c) hybrid stabilization that utilizes a combination of soft/nonstructural and hard/structural materials.

The Natural bank stabilization approach is often utilized in low- to medium-energy estuarine environments either using soft/nonstructural stabilization or hybrid stabilization. Based on our site analysis, we recommend using soft/nonstructural stabilization in order to maintain the natural aesthetic of the space.

Stabilization can be achieved through the use of natural vegetation, submerged aquatic vegetation, and biodegradable organic materials (e.g. natural fiber logs, organic matting). A nonstructural approach allows for increased vegetation, preserves/creates habitat for estuarine/shallow water organisms, and maintains natural habitat features and shoreline dynamics.

Left: Habitat creation with Living Shoreline stabilization.
Photo: Rich Takacs, NOAA Restoration Center

Right: Living Shoreline stabilization with bio-log and natural vegetation.
Photo: Rich Takacs, NOAA Restoration Center

Above: Hybrid Living Shoreline stabilization with bio-log, natural vegetation, and rock footer.
Photo: Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Boardwalk

The proposed walkway through the wooded section of the site is intended to provide pedestrian access to fishing spots along the river as well as the creek edge that borders the property. The boardwalk should be approximately five to six feet in width and raised at least six inches above the soil; in some areas the height and setback may need to be adjusted as much as 18 inches above grade to accommodate tree roots.

Small shade-loving shrubs such as hostas and ferns can be planted along the walkway to increase visual interest and better define the safe areas for pedestrian activity; hardscape edging in areas where it is unsafe for pedestrians to step off the main path is also recommended. Appropriately scaled furnishings such as benches and trash cans can be positioned at intervals along the boardwalk, creating opportunities for interpretive signage.
Landscape Amenities

In addition to infrastructure and vegetation improvements, there are numerous other amenities that can help to enhance the landscape environment including lighting, furniture, and trash bins. It is important to remember that when incorporating such amenities, uniformity is crucial in order to achieve a cohesive landscape. Receptacles should be located in convenient, easily accessible places that are visible to potential users; trash bins in isolated areas are seldom used and often result in littering. Due to frequency of use furnishings should be fixed in place.

Accessibility

Large groups often venture to outdoor recreation areas with the specific intent to picnic. Accessible furnishings facilitate inclusion and socialization of park visitors. Provision off accessible picnic tables above and beyond the minimums allows for equally convenient services for people with or without disabilities.

Above and Left: Accessible picnic tables and sites provide opportunities for a broader visitor base. Supporting surfaces must be stable and firm with a preferred slope of 1:50 (max. 1:33).
Summary

Given the budget constraints associated with this project, we recommend a phased approach to implementation. Phasing allows for work to be started immediately and using the master plan as a guide, ongoing efforts can result in a cohesive landscape. Based on the improvements suggested, we propose the following implementation schedule:

Phase I – Shoreline Restoration
- Introduction of appropriate groundcover near river edge
- Installation of submerged aquatic vegetation and natural fiber logs/ organic matting

Phase II – Acquisition of Gas Station Property
- Construction of parking and Visitor Center
- Construction of pedestrian overlook points

Phase III – Construction of new Boat Landing Ramp
- Removal of old landing strip

Phase IV – Construction of tiered Decks/ Terraces
- Construction of boardwalk connections to river walk, Veterans Park, and through wooded area
- Construction of fishing piers

Phase V – Site Furnishings and Streetscaping
- Lighting
- Street trees
- Picnic tables and seating
- Trash cans
- Installation of interpretive signage

The key to successfully implementing a landscape project of this scope on a limited budget is careful planning and prudent management. Dividing a project into phases to be implemented over a long time period typically increases cost in addition to the risk of wastage in both material and labor. To avoid these issues management must be extremely vigilant and pragmatic in its dealings with both volunteers and contractors.