New Ideas and Opportunities for Americus Downtown Buildings
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The Sumter County Archway Partnership and the Americus Downtown Development Authority (DDA) are hoping to enhance the use of the upper floors of the downtown buildings. Americus is a community rich with historical structures and strongly supports historical preservation. Renovating these vacant spaces will provide numerous opportunities that will benefit the downtown area.

The Archway Partnership contacted Dr. Leslie Sharp in the College of Architecture at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Dr. Sharp teaches a course geared toward preservation and reuse of space in downtown buildings, with specific emphasis on second floor and higher spaces. Dr. Sharp and 31 students participating in the “Introduction to Historic Preservation” course visited Americus on March 3-4, 2012.

Dr. Sharp said, “Working with the City of Americus and the Archway Partnership provided my class a fantastic learning experience. The students, both graduate and undergraduate, had the opportunity to participate in a real-life project to provide property owners with ideas for ways in which the upper floors of historic buildings could be utilized.” She also said, “The students from architecture, building construction, city and regional planning, engineering, and history majors were able to combine their different knowledge bases and skills to help meet the needs of the community while respecting the historic character of the buildings. It is extremely important for students to get out into Georgia and partner with local communities so that they will be better prepared to enter the workforce.”

The students were divided into ten teams, and were assigned a designated building within the DDA district. They spent two days reviewing current conditions, while considering the need to be mindful of historic architectural features that might be highlighted during renovation. After reviewing the spaces, students developed ideas for reuse, which would meet the needs of the downtown historic district. These ideas included lofts, outdoor patio spaces, lounge and bar areas for businesses, and creating unique spaces for the connected properties.

Charles Crisp of the Sumter Historic Trust and the Americus Historic Preservation Commission believes the partnership with the students will prove to be very positive for the town. “It was good to have these students with a fresh perspective and new insights that assisted us in continuing in the right direction,” he said. “We are getting ready to begin one project with construction starting within the next month and the community is really excited about it.”

The students presented their designs in a classroom presentation on April 19, 2012. They hosted Barbara Grogan, Sumter Archway Professional, Mark Minick, President of Sumter Historic Trust, and Charles Crisp. There was also a presentation hosted in August 2012 to share the ideas with the rest of the community, which included members from the DDA, City Council members, the Mayor, and property owners.

Angie Singletary, the Downtown Development Director for the City of Americus, said, “I am constantly looking for ways to improve our downtown quality of life. Barbara Grogan and I visited Sandersville, GA to hear a presentation similar to what we are trying to do here in Sumter County. We immediately realized how beneficial a project like that would be for our community. Before we knew it, the finished product was being presented to 38 members of our community including property owners, business leaders, council members, as well as the mayor. The word had spread and three attendees came from two neighboring counties to see what all the buzz was about! The relationships Archway has helped us form throughout our community is priceless!”

Advancing Community Priorities: Economic development is one of Sumter County’s top priorities. The community has a continuous desire to grow, advance, and be successful while preserving the historic beauty and characteristics that define the community. This project will help the future growth of downtown Americus by using available spaces for new projects that will benefit the community.