**Downtown Renaissance Becomes a Reality**

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Downtowns are often overlooked as engines of sustainable economic development. In the Fall of 2011, citizens of Cairo and Grady County came together in an Archway Partnership sponsored listening session to identify needs for community and economic development. Among those needs were many aspects pertaining to downtown revitalization. Community leaders from the Grady County Archway Partnership Executive Committee seized this opportunity to make a difference in Cairo by forming a Downtown Revitalization Issue Work Group.

Over the years, the City of Cairo had taken incremental steps to improve its historic commercial district. Efforts have included the creation of the Downtown Development Authority in 1982, the designation of Cairo Commercial Historic District in 1997, the development of a Downtown Cairo Master Plan in 2009, and a Transportation Enhancement Grant in 2011.

The Archway Partnership collaborated with the UGA Small Business Development Center research team to prepare several downtown business studies including an industry sector oversupply/undersupply report, Retail Market Power Analysis, 10-mile radius study, and several other indicators of the retail mix in downtown Cairo.

Using these resources, the Archway Partnership Downtown Revitalization Issue Work Group, consisting of public and private sector stakeholders, initiated efforts to enhance the downtown. Cairo was chosen as a pilot city for the Georgia Renaissance Strategic Visioning program. The goal was to craft a vision and a project-ready work plan through public engagement, visioning and design as well as short-term, achievable projects that would add value to the streetscape project. Another goal was to position Cairo to achieve investment ready designation through the proposed Georgia Downtown Renaissance Act. The program is conducted in partnership with UGA’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government, Georgia Municipal Association, and the Georgia Cities Foundation.

“Through the Archway Partnership process, an unprecedented number of citizens have come together, formed committees, identified action items, and in collaboration with the City, they have completed many short terms projects. Archway has really brought people together and helped us progress in a very short time period,” says Cairo City Manager Chris Addleton.

In December 2013, the City of Cairo was selected as one of 19 Georgia cities to participate in the Georgia Department of Community Affairs Main Street Start-up program, which provides technical assistance to communities looking to improve their downtowns. Four active committees are working on various short and long term projects and programs including marketing, design, economic development, and overall coordination of downtown activities.

Because of efforts such as these, Cairo/Grady County was recognized by Georgia Trend as a “Four for the Future” award winner in 2014.

**Advancing Community Priorities:** Several community-identified needs encompassed downtown revitalization including exploring opportunities to support retail development, creating a sense of place through branding, delineating the Central Business District, beautifying streetscapes and railways/depot, coordinating downtown activities, and identifying opportunities for business or service industry development. The Downtown Revitalization Issue Work Group is actively addressing all of these needs.