



**Brownsville**  
on the move

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Draft sept 2011



**a comprehensive  
development plan**

prepared by

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**MEMPHIS**

Graduate Program in  
City and Regional Planning



## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Forming a Planning Team.....	4
3. Research Methodology .....	4
4. Major Research Findings.....	5
5. Working Towards a Better Brownsville: Overall Development Goal and Specific Community Development Objectives .....	6
8. The Brownsville Comprehensive Community Development Action Plan .....	8
9. Signature Project #1   Court Square Revitalization Project .....	15
10. Signature Project #2   Brownsville Greenway System .....	18
11. Where we go from here? .....	22
12. For More Information .....	22

## 1. Introduction

In the fall of 2009, Sharon Hayes, a member of the Brownsville Planning Commission, requested a meeting with Ken Reardon, Director of the University of Memphis' Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning, to discuss the City of Brownsville's current and future planning needs. Following this initial meeting, representatives of the U of M's graduate planning program traveled to Brownsville to meet with then-Mayor Banks and a small committee of local residents, business owners, and elected officials.

At the conclusion of this meeting, Mayor Banks asked the U of M planning faculty if they would help he and his fellow elected officials answer the following question, "Why do workers attracted to our recently developed industrial park chose to live outside of Brownsville? During the spring of 2010, eight U of M graduate students undertook a variety of research activities designed to answer this question. In May of 2010, the students presented their research report recommending a number of urban design, eco and heritage tourism, and marketing and branding initiatives to encourage a higher percentage of local workers to live in town.

The success of this initial student project, prompted local officials to ask the State's Local Planning Assistance Office and the University of Memphis to work together to produce a comprehensive plan designed to enhance the city's overall quality of life. In October of 2010, the City of Brownsville entered into a

contract with the U of M Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning to carry out the data collection and analysis activities required to produce an inspired comprehensive plan.

This planning process began in the fall of 2010 when U of M planning faculty and students met with local residents, City Planning Commissioners, Aldermen, and other interested parties to establish the guiding values for this effort. Local residents challenged the U of M planners to devise a planning process and document that was:

- Transparent
- Resident-driven
- Environmentally sensitive
- Based on the community's most significant current assets
- Informed by the best available environmental, economic, and social data
- Inspired by both domestic and international "best practices"
- Action-oriented
- Feasible in light of existing public and private resources
- Capable of encouraging important new local, regional, state, national, and international partnerships
- Designed to be easily updated based upon changing local conditions

## 2. Forming a Planning Team

In the spring of 2011, the Graduate Department of City and Regional Planning organized a Special Projects Studio to collect and analyze the data needed to develop a comprehensive development plan for Brownsville. Nine advanced graduate planning students and four planning faculty were recruited to participate in this effort. Among the faculty were:

- **Kenneth M. Reardon**, Professor and Director of the Graduate Program in City and Regional Planning (Ph.D., Cornell University)
- **David Westendorff**, Associate Professor in City and Regional Planning (Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning (Ph.D., Cornell University)
- **Laura Saija**, Visiting Professor and Marie Curie Research Fellow (European Union), (Ph.D., University of Catania)
- **Steve Redding**, Research Faculty and Director of the Regional Economic Development Center (M.B.A., University of Alabama)

These faculty, were assisted in this effort by Thomas Skehan, former Senior Planner from the State of Tennessee’s Local Planning Assistance Office in Jackson and Bob Barber, Director of Planning in Hernando, Mississippi.

## 3. Research Methodology

The importance of accurately analyzing existing conditions and future development options prompted the team to utilize a rigorous research design that actively involved local residents and leaders in each and every step of the planning process.

Among the specific research activities undertaken by the U of M team were:

- a.) Archival research focused on historical studies, reports, and plans describing environmental, economic, and social conditions in Brownsville and Haywood County;
- b.) Library research and key informant interviews designed to produce an updated social history of the community and its people;
- c.) An analysis of recent population and housing trends using US Census data for the period of 1990 thru 2010
- d.) Face-to-face interviews with key institutional leaders to elicit their perceptions of current conditions as well as preferred development options
- e.) Focus groups with important stakeholder groups, including: small businesses owners, local corporate leaders, school officials, high school students and ministers to elicit their perceptions and preferences
- f.) A community forum, conducted in Spanish, to provide Latinos/as with an opportunity to share their views on local conditions and future revitalization possibilities
- g.) Telephone interviews with approximately 300 Brownsville residents to elicit their perceptions and preferences
- h.) A series of four community forums culminating in a Community Summit that actively involves more than 300 local residents in the data analysis, future goal setting, and action plan development

The data from these multiple research activities was presented to local stakeholders at the Brownville Community Summit held on May 12<sup>th</sup>. More than 60 residents and leaders attending this forum used this information to establish an overall development goal (mission statement), identify specific community development objectives, and formulate a preliminary action plan containing immediate-term projects (1-5 years to implement), short-term projects (6-10 years to implement) and long-term projects (11-15 years to implement). It is important for readers to note that local residents and business owners suggested the vast majority of the “action projects” featured in this Executive Summary. All of the projects included in this document were reviewed and approved by neighborhood residents and local leaders at a series of public meetings.

The following section provides a quick summary of the U of M’s major research findings.

#### 4. Major Research Findings

- Brownsville and Haywood County continue to be highly productive agricultural areas, specializing in cotton production;
  - Unlike many other smaller cities in Western Tennessee, Brownsville has successfully attracted new manufacturing, assembly, and warehouse firms and jobs to its recently developed industrial parks;
  - The City’s location at the entrance to the Hatchie National Wildlife Preserve combined with its many historical, cultural, and architectural assets, offer new opportunities to take advantage of the South’s growing eco and cultural tourism movement;
  - The community is well positioned to take advantage of a number of current and proposed state and Federal economic development and transportation projects, including:
    - The recently-begun, State-funded solar farm that will attract significant numbers of new visitors to the area;
    - The proposed development of the State-funded Mega-Site located and designed to attract a number of closely-related, job-producing industries to the area; and
    - The completion of I-269 to the west that will dramatically increase the flow of people and goods through the region.
  - Brownsville’s rich social history is well preserved and interpreted by volunteers and staff affiliated with a number of local historical and cultural institutions, including the Delta Heritage Center, Haywood County Museum, and the Dunbar Museum;
  - A significant number of new Latino/a families have moved into the area attracted by its easy access to nearby jobs, affordable housing, and home-town feel;
  - A municipal government led by an inspired and highly competent group of elected leaders and appointed staff who are effective problem-solvers committed to a cooperative approach to governance;
  - A municipal administration that has built a solid base of citizen support mobilizing many previously uninvolved residents for public service, while strengthening the city’s relationships with leaders in county, state, and Federal government.
- In spite of these many community assets, Brownsville’s elected and appointed leaders will have to address a number of serious challenges if the city is to build upon the abovementioned assets to insure a prosperous future. Among these challenges are:

- A weak public image that fails to communicate Brownsville’s rich past, healthy present, and potentially vibrant future;
- A less than ideal location five miles north of Interstate 40 – the state’s busiest roadway;
- Entranceways and major arterials whose poor urban design quality offer an underwhelming first impression of the city;
- An historically and architecturally significant Downtown that has experienced significant business losses and serious neglect of some of its most important buildings;
- Ongoing population losses fueled by concerns regarding school quality, housing choice, retail services; and youth activities;
- Low educational attainment levels placing Brownsville’s adult workers at a marked disadvantage when competing for living wage jobs within the region’s increasingly competitive labor market;
- Increasing competition for investment, businesses, jobs and tax revenues from nearby Jackson – Western Tennessee’s fastest growing city;
- Recurring flooding along selective segments of the City’s agricultural drainage system that has caused the deterioration of many of its most affordable homes; and
- The persistence of racial and class-rooted tensions that continue to hinder the City’s cooperative problem solving, planning, and development efforts.

## 5. Working Towards a Better Brownsville: Overall Development Goal and Specific Community Development Objectives

Strongly influenced by Kretzman and McKnight’s “asset-based community development” theory participants in the Brownsville planning process committed themselves to creating and implementing a plan that builds upon the City’s many strengths to enable it to:

**Position Brownsville as West Tennessee’s most desirable city recognized for its natural beauty, rich cultural history, artistic attractions and musical heritage, abundant agriculture, exceptional architecture and unique town square, quality public services, faith-based traditions, and love of learning, with a central location within the *metropolitan region* bounded by the scenic *Hatchie River* – a thriving community where small town values, *quality of life, diversity, and entrepreneurial spirit* are honored daily.**

Those participating in the Brownsville on the Move planning process were confident this goal could be achieved over the course of the next fifteen years through an aggressive, disciplined, and strategic pursuit of the following seven development objectives:

1. To preserve and enhance the city’s public spaces and build environment through the skillful application of advanced **urban design** principles and methods.
2. To expand the city’s economic and tax base by expanding **local employment, entrepreneurial, and investment opportunities**

for current and future residents and business owners with special attention to the future development of local agribusinesses and the urban food system.

3. To improve residents' overall **health and wellness** by improving access to the City's many natural areas through a proposed greenway system that will improve the city storm water management system while connecting Brownsville to the Hatchie River & Wildlife Sanctuary and the region's ever expanding urban trails system.
4. To strengthen the city's competitive position within the region and nation through strategic investment in **public education, arts, and culture**, to make the City a place where lifelong learning opportunities are tied to the City's ongoing community revitalization efforts through the cooperation of the County School District, Community Colleges, and Technical Centers and nearby Universities.
5. To develop the city as a destination for those seeking access to a wide range of **recreational opportunities** (bird watching, hiking, biking, canoeing, kayaking, hunting, as well as traditional team sports) and **tourist attractions and events** (music events, cultural festivals, etc.).
6. To promote a balanced approach to **transportation** that enhances access and choice by giving serious attention to walking, biking, driving, and public transit alternatives.
7. To insure **housing choice and security** for current and future city residents through a public-private partnership-promoting creative approaches to workforce housing that include preservation and infill in established neighborhood as well as new high quality housing development.

The City of Brownsville will achieve these specific community development objectives by mobilizing its residents, business owners, and institutional leaders to work with a variety of public and private partners to pursue the comprehensive improvement plan outlined in the following pages of this report. The plan features a set of near, short, and long-term improvement projects designed to enable the City to achieve each of its seven community improvement objectives on its way towards becoming "Western Tennessee's most unique, desirable, and diverse small city."

The improvement projects featured in each of the following seven-community development sections are organized in a progressive or developmental fashion. Efforts that the City, and its partners, are currently poised to successfully undertake are proposed as near-term efforts to be carried out within the first five years of the plan's adoption. More ambitious efforts that build upon the successful completion of these near-term efforts but require more planning time, greater financial and human resources, an expanded set of public/private partnerships, and enabling state and/or Federal legislation are proposed to be carried out five to ten years after the plan's adoption. The most complex and potential transformative community development projects are recommended for implementation eleven to fifteen years following the plan's final adoption.

Like most plans, the community improvement program presented within the Brownsville on the Move document should be systematically reviewed and revised every five years to take into account changing demographic, economic, employment, housing, and fiscal trends affecting the city, region, and nation and the City's changing implementation experience.

## 8. The Brownsville Comprehensive Community Development Action Plan

During the coming fifteen years, the City of Brownsville will use their operating and capital spending, discretionary grant-seeking, land use policy-making, public-private partnerships, marketing and branding, state and Federal advocacy and citizen and leadership training activities to successfully implement the following Comprehensive Community Development Plan.

### 1. To preserve and enhance public spaces and the built environment through the application of advanced urban design principles and methods.

Near-Term (1-5 years)	Short-Term (6-10 years)	Long-Term (11-15 years)
Expand the existing urban growth boundary to guide future development at the city's periphery	Form a Main Street organization to accelerate the redesign, redevelopment and repositioning of the Court Square District	Adopt a form-based land use control ordinance to encourage more pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use districts
Create new entranceways to the city along with an improved way-finding system to guide residents and visitors to local attractions and services	Initiate a public murals project within the Court Square District to transform highly-visible but unsightly exterior walls into public art installations celebrating the area's social history	Abandonment of campus based school complexes at the City's periphery in favor of the adaptive re-use of infill sites closer to the town center
Evaluate the city's existing historic districts with an eye towards expanding their boundaries, devising better interpretive materials, organizing weekly tours and investigating the possibility of establishing new districts	Launch an ongoing corridor improvement project featuring façade enhancements, street furniture improvements, and inspired landscape installations (Beginning with Main Street)	Establishment of a public sculpture trail beginning at the Mindfield exposing visitors to the City's Downtown and historic neighborhoods

**2. To strengthen the City’s economic and tax base by expanding local employment, entrepreneurial, and investment opportunities for current and future residents and business owners.**

Near-Term (1-5 years)	Short-Term (6-10 years)	Long-Term (11-15 years)
<p>Implement an aggressive marketing, promotion, and branding strategy to sell Brownsville as an attractive residential community, profitable business location, and exciting tourist destination</p>	<p>Recruit a popular local restaurateur and baker to establish a quality family dining establishment and bakery within the Court Square District</p>	<p>Launch a campaign to attract the Regional 4-H Youth Education and Training Center to Brownsville</p>
<p>Initiate a “buy local” campaign within municipal and county government and the non-profits they support to increase the percentage of goods and services they purchase within the city and county</p>	<p>Develop a natural resources conservation program encouraging green design building, and retrofitting practices providing State Solar Farm visitors with a compelling reason to visit Brownsville as an emerging leader in the Emerald Cities movement</p>	<p>Repurpose the College Hill Complex, on a seasonal basis, to serve as a Summer Music, Art, and Theatre Camp attracting young people and their families to the City</p>
<p>Organize a Friday Evening Music Series, Saturday Farmers Market, Sunday Classic Outdoor Movie Program and end-of the-school year Social History Festival to attract residents and visitors to the Court Square District</p>	<p>Enhance and promote the City’s existing athletic complex as a venue for local, regional, and national athletic leagues seeking a tournament location</p>	<p>Redevelop the County Courthouse as a Multi-University Center offering on-site and on-line courses, certificates, and degrees to high school students seeking AP courses and non-traditional students, especially those interested in entrepreneurship</p>

**3. To improve the overall health and wellness of local residents by improving access to the city’s many natural areas through a proposed greenway system connecting Brownsville to the Hatchie Wildlife Preserve and the region’s ever-expanding urban trails system.**

Near-Term (1-5 years)	Short-Term (6-10 years)	Long-Term (11-15 years)
<p>Establish a Greenway Conservancy to coordinate the planning and development of a circumferential greenway that will serve as a central feature of the City’s flood control system and an important regional recreational amenity</p>	<p>Implementation of a multi-pronged development strategy focused on securing public and private resources to complete segments of the greenway on-line</p>	<p>Design and construct a public hiking and biking trail connecting the City’s proposed greenway to the Hatchie Wildlife Preserve</p>
<p>Complete conceptual drawings and construction documents related to the establishment of a fully-developed greenway (Emerald Necklace) around the City</p>	<p>Acquire land and utility easements required to complete the greenway as well as a public hiking and biking trail along Sugar Creek to strengthen the City’s connection to the Hatchie Wildlife Preserve</p>	<p>Integrate the Brownsville Greenway and Sugar Creek Trail to the region’s emerging urban and rural trails and scenic by-ways program</p>
<p>Produce a storm water retention plan and design reflecting international best practices for the Court Square District and Nixon Creek Corridor</p>	<p>Organize an international design competition for the creation of a “green” Head of the Trail Information, Education, Rental, and Repair Facility</p>	<p>Implement sidewalk and street improvements to enhance local connectivity to this growing urban/rural trails system</p>

**4. To strengthen the City’s competitive position within the region and nation through strategic investment in public education, arts, and culture.**

Near-Term (1-5 years)	Short-Term (6-10 years)	Long-Term (11-15 years)
<p>Expand the number of English as a Second Language (ESL) and General Education Diploma courses for youth and adult learners</p>	<p>Work with area businesses, institutions, and agencies to develop internships that will allow students to acquire new knowledge and skills while strengthening their attachment to Brownsville increasing the likelihood they will return to the City upon their graduation from college</p>	<p>Encourage local business to come together to fund three Graduate Research Assistantships at the U of M to assist the Haywood County Museum, Dunbar Cultural Center, and the Delta Heritage Museum in securing the services of three anthropology, education, and or museum studies students to assist with basic acquisition, interpretation, and educational tasks</p>
<p>Increase the number and variety of AP courses available to Brownsville and Haywood County secondary students thereby improving their college admissions profiles and completion times</p>	<p>Explore ways to utilize the area’s numerous museums to further local students’ understanding of their community’s rich social history and increasingly diverse population</p>	<p>Support local cultural institutions in carrying out a cooperative development campaign aimed at raising desperately-needed funds for acquisition, display, interpretation, and educational activities</p>
<p>Encourage the adoption of a service-learning approach to education in order to improve student learning outcomes and enhance youth’s commitment to public service</p>	<p>Design and build a new Haywood County High School on or near Court House Square using green design principles that will allow students to actively study sustainable approaches to architecture and planning</p>	<p>Engage the community’s three museums, historical society, and library in creating a joint exhibition on the people, places, and contribution of Haywood County to the artistic, cultural, and political life of Western Tennessee</p>

5. To develop Brownsville as a destination for those seeking access to a wide range of active recreational opportunities, including bird watching, hiking, biking, canoeing, kayaking, hunting, as well as traditional team sports (baseball, softball, basketball, tennis, and golf).

Near-Term (1-5 years)	Short-Term (6-10 years)	Long-Term (11-15 years)
Redesign the City’s web page highlighting Brownsville’s many recreational facilities, programs, services, and events	Work with the local Y and representatives of the City’s many faith-based organizations to develop a strategy for enrolling 75% of the City’s school-aged children, 30% of the City’s working-age individuals, and 20% of the City’s seniors in Michelle Obama’s “Lets Get Moving” health and wellness campaign	Incorporate community-accessible recreation facilities into future public school buildings transforming these structures into community school centers as envisioned by John Dewey that can serve as the primary civic spaces within every neighborhood
Improve the approaching signage on Interstate 40 by featuring the community’s many recreational, cultural, and educational resources	Collaborate with local businesses, hiking and biking clubs, and environmentalists to sponsor three major sporting events each year to bring health and fitness-minded individuals and families to the City (Spring bicycle race, Summer foot race, and a Fall canoe and kayak race)	Organize a major regional dragon boat race down the Hatchie River to promote greater local and tourist use of this scenic river way
Develop a Welcome to Brownsville Tourism Brochure that can be downloaded from the web that introduces the community’s many family-owned farms, historical landmarks, educational and cultural attractions, recreational facilities, and other community assets	Enhance the City’s existing sports complexes in order to attract important regional, national, and international tournaments to the community	Collaborate with the local branch of the Audubon Society and Cornell University’s Ornithology Laboratory to organize an annual bird-watching competition and census in the Hatchie Wildlife Preserve

**6. To promote a balanced approach to transportation that enhances access and choice by giving serious attention to walking, biking, driving, and public transit alternatives**

Near-Term (1-5 years)	Short-Term (6-10 years)	Long-Term (11-15 years)
<p>Survey and repair the City’s existing sidewalk system to encourage walking for environmental, health and community-building purposes</p>	<p>Work with the Chamber of Commerce to encourage the establishment of a bike sales, rental, and repair business on the proposed greenway either in or near the Court Square District to support an anticipated growth in the local biking community</p>	<p>Experiment with a municipally-sponsored car-sharing program (Zip car) that would place a limited number of vehicles at convenient locations for dues-paying members to use</p>
<p>Pursue a State Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School Grant to encourage larger numbers of students to walk and bike to and from school</p>	<p>Survey those employed by local firms to determine if car sharing and pooling could reduce local miles traveled without a loss of convenience</p>	<p>Collaborate with local utility executives and municipal engineers to establish sites for electric car re-charging</p>
<p>Assist the City Engineer in establishing dedicated and shared bike lanes that encourage bicycle use for short trips to work, school, and errands</p>	<p>Research the feasibility of establishing either van or bus service from Brownsville to major employment centers in Jackson and Memphis</p>	<p>Work with regional public transit officials to determine the feasibility of establishing a local public bus route connecting major residential complexes and neighborhoods with area employment, health, retail, education, cultural, civic and recreational center which is becoming extremely important due to increasing percentage of population below 16 years of age and above 65 years of age</p>

**7. To insure housing choice and security for current and future city residents through the establishment of a public-private partnership promoting creative approaches to workforce housing.**

Near-Term (1-5 years)	Short-Term (6-10 years)	Long-Term (11-15 years)
Mobilize local faith-based communities to participate in the Christmas-in-April Program offering preventive maintenance and basic home repair assistance to eligible low-income individuals and families	Re-zone Court Square District to encourage a variety of in-town housing developments reinforcing the economic and social function of the city center	Redevelop Bradford Square as a mixed-income, mixed-use, mixed-finance project to include housing, neighborhood-oriented retail services, including a grocery, and various educational and civic functions
Expand senior and low-income home repair program to assist homeowners facing more serious housing challenges	Meet with local corporate leaders to explore the establishment of an employer assisted housing fund encouraging rehabilitation and new construction in targeted areas	Explore replacement of the County’s most troubled family housing complex by taking advantage of HUD’s newly-established Choice Neighborhood
Work with local non and/or for-profit developers to rehabilitate foreclosed properties for families displaced by recent and recurring flooding	Recruit a recognized non-profit senior housing provider to develop an assisted living complex offering a range of housing types and supportive services	Seek a developer interested in working with local residents and leaders to design and build a green housing project that promotes resource conservation, active lifestyles, and social integration

## 9. Signature Project #1 | Court Square Revitalization Project

Throughout history, town and city centers have played critical economic, social, and political functions. Communities tend to locate their most important institutions within their downtown districts. It is here that one finds the city's most significant public spaces, monuments and memorials, religious buildings, commercial establishments, professional practices, cultural institutions and municipal agencies. The layout of the streets, condition of the infrastructure, architectural quality of the buildings, occupancy and maintenance levels of the structures, and the vitality of the street life with a downtown serves as important benchmarks of the current health and future vitality of the community.

Most of Brownsville's major arterials terminate at the historic County Courthouse Building located in the heart of the City's Court Square District. This landmark structure is surrounded by a wonderful mix of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> commercial buildings that once housed many of the city's first hotels, banks, law offices, and dry goods firms. Sadly, what was once a vibrant downtown serving the commercial, financial, legal, entertainment, and worship needs of the region's farm owners and agricultural workers has, in the Post-World War II-era, experienced significant business losses and physical decline.

The combined effects of farm mechanization and consolidation, ongoing suburbanization, the eclipse of small-scale

downtown and neighborhood-oriented retail by chain stores and malls, changing consumer shopping patterns, along with increasing competition from nearby Jackson, has had a near devastating impact on the Court Square District. While many Brownsvillians has deep affection for the City's historic town center, few patronize the stores and business that currently line the streets surrounding the historic Courthouse.

### Planning goals

- Carryout a series of public improvements to dramatically improve the physical appearance of this important historic district;
- Organize a series of public events to significantly increase the number of people coming to downtown;
- Amend the city's land use control ordinance so as to increase the number of people living downtown;
- Provide incentives to encourage developers to acquire and improve existing buildings in and near the Court Square District;
- Establish a Main Street Program the features a business improvement district tax to organize and implement an aggressive branding and marketing campaign to attract people to the downtown for shopping, dining, educational, and cultural events;
- Position the Court Square District to serve as the major connector linking the soon-to-be developed Brownsville Greenway and the proposed Hatchie Wildlife Preserve.

## Action Program

### *Phase I: Packing the Winnebago to Come Downtown*

- ✓ Invite local music educators and musicians to meet for the purpose of organizing a summer music series on the Square to attract residents and visitors to the Downtown District.
- ✓ Assist organizers of the existing Brownsville Farmers Market to move their operation into Court Square on Saturday mornings.
- ✓ Purchase the equipment needed to host a Sunday Film Festival that will show classic movies outdoors every Sunday evening during the summer.
- ✓ Work with local civic leaders to organize four seasonal events that can be built overtime to increase the number of residents and visitors coming downtown.

### *Phase II: Organizing for the Long Hall*

- ✓ Establish a Main Street Program to design and implement a multi-pronged media campaign using traditional and social media to promote the Court Square District.
- ✓ Create a Business Improvement District (BID) to finance the branding, marketing, and promotion campaign.
- ✓ Conduct a detailed historical and existing physical conditions survey to identify specific improvements needed to enhance the physical appearance of the downtown.
- ✓ Develop a Small Towns Community Development Block Grant Program to finance basic streetscape improvements in the downtown, including: period lamp posts, attractive street

furniture, inoffensive trash receptacles, way finding signage, conveniently-located downtown directories, landscaping, and textured street crossings.

- ✓ Raised funds to design and implement a façade improvement program starting with stores surrounding the Court House through which owners can secure matching grants up to \$5,000 for re-pointing exterior brick walls, repainting window trim, re-building ailing stoops and porches, and adding an awning.
- ✓ Create an urban trail that connects the Brownsville Greenway with the Hatchie River Trail increasing access to these important natural and recreational areas for local residents and providing users of these trails with important services and amenities.
- ✓ Investigate the feasibility of establishing a Tax Incremental Financing District covering the Court Square District and the streets immediately surrounding it to increase funding available for residential and commercial.
- ✓ Explore the possibility of using the Federal Low-Income Housing, Historic Preservation and New Market Tax Credit Programs to secure additional funding to incentivize investment in the City's Court Square district.

### *Phase III Encouraging New Development*

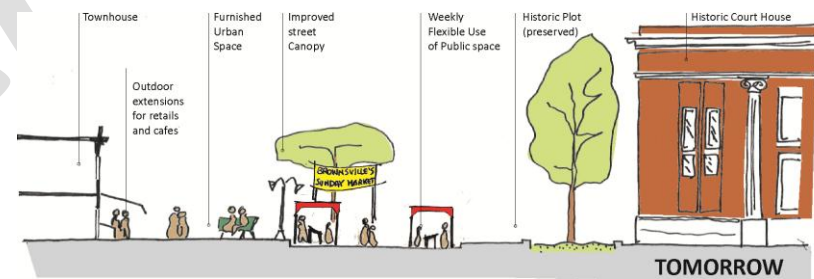
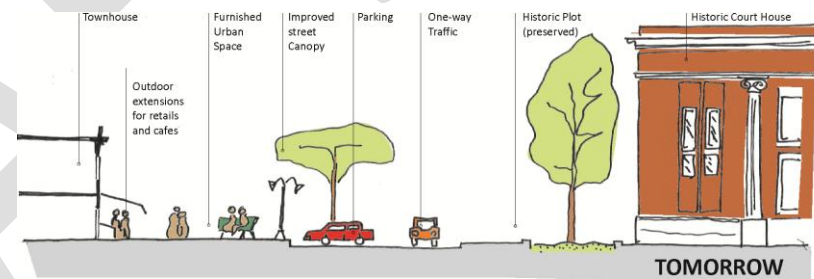
- ✓ Amend the City's existing zoning ordinance to encourage the rehabilitation of existing buildings and the development of new structures on the square that feature first floor retail and upper story residential and/or commercial use.
- ✓ Develop a package of zoning, finance, and tax exemption services to encourage downtown property owners as well as

interested developers to rehabilitate existing structures for mix-use projects featuring both market-rate and affordable housing.

- ✓ Work with the Chamber of Commerce and the University of Memphis Fogelman College of Business Administration to develop a “case book” based upon a rigorous analysis of the local retail market that can be used in recruiting four high-priority businesses to downtown – a family restaurant, a quality baker, an ice cream shop catering to the city’s substantial teenage and young adult population, and a bike sales and repair center to serve the growing number of residents who will be utilizing non-motorized transportation and biking the region’s urban and rural trail system.
- ✓ Investigate the feasibility of redeveloping the historic Court House structure as an important new education center offering a wide range of on-site classes by area colleges, including: Southwest Tennessee Community College, University of Memphis, University of Tennessee and Tennessee State University. These courses will be taken by area high school students on an AP course basis and adult learners seeking to complete degrees and/or certificates. The building will also house a mini-museum housing a small collection of artifacts from the City’s three museums that area school children can visit in order to gain a deeper understanding of area’s rich social history.



The section of one of the street surrounding Brownsville’s Court Square that shows how much of the space is dedicated to vehicular traffic



Urban design and specific public policies can help enhancing the Court Square Area

## 10. Signature Project #2 | Brownsville Greenway System

### Project background and purposes

The City of Brownsville is located on the ridgeline separating two watersheds, the Hatchie river watershed to the south, and the South Forked Deer watershed to the north. The County river ecosystems, and especially the Hatchie, are among the best-preserved in terms of biodiversity and stream quality. The Hatchie is today a protected area by virtue of its federal designation as the “Hatchie Wildlife Refuge”.

In spite of Brownsville’s strategic location, large sections of the its poorest neighborhoods surrounding or in the historic center, including the College Hill Historic District and the Downtown, flood on a regular basis. The most recent of these was the 500-year flood that hit mid Tennessee during the month of May (2010) seriously damaging large sections of the city. This convinced city leaders of the need to review the flood histories of other US cities and their responses. Among those responses was the San Antonio river restoration concept, consisting of systems of swales and levees that are both protective of the natural systems and the built environment while providing important recreational amenities for the nearby Low-income neighborhood and other city residents living farther away.

In Brownsville, the idea is to establish a greenway that surrounds and bisects the city while also connecting existing and new parks in the flood plain to be created in strategic areas within the damaged neighborhoods. In order to do so, the City has already used FEMA funds to acquire the most at-risk properties within the flood zone.

The re-design of the ground water system and the design of the proposed greenway system will have to address:

- The re-location and re-housing needs of families whose properties flood on a regular basis;
- The perception of some residents that such a large linear park around the city would be hard to maintain, and would attract and encourage crime (lack of eyes on the street) and would in the end become an eyesore.

### Contribution to the Plan's Objectives

While providing a more natural and sustainable (less maintenance) storm water management system, the greenway is conceived as a multi-purpose infrastructure element that contributing to all 6 objectives of this plan. These are to:

- a. **Preserve and enhance historic built environments.** The trail/floodplain section will connect urban paths to the major historic attractions of the city, while appropriate signage and way-finding systems will encourage tourists and locals using the overall trails to experience the city’s historic heritage,

enhancing their awareness of the cultural significance of the City's historic heritage. The urban trails and paths will also be part of the overall project of improvement of specific sections of the historic district.

- b. **Support economic development in the City.** More generally, the Greenway will help establish Brownsville and Haywood County become attractive destinations for eco-tourism, especially for residents of the region who want to take a day-trip (or more) to enjoy/explore the rare natural vistas of the of the Hatchie National Wildlife Refuge. Moreover, new retail businesses related to outdoor activities can also be located along the trail.
- c. **Promote healthy living.** The trail will promote health and wellness among residents of all ages (walking, biking, running, etc.) and has to include spaces and physical infrastructures for outdoor activities (bike and running rails; yoga and stretching furnished areas, etc.). Specific sports can be promoted along the trail by non-profit organizations and special-interest groups.
- d. **Education and culture.** Pieces of the greenway can be converted into outdoor classrooms where children can play while landscaping, growing food, composting and recycling, etc. This will help populate the trail and offer children an occasion to play an active role within the community, contributing practically to the collective landscape, recreation and events promoting the greenway.
- e. **Increase recreational opportunities.** The greenway system can be promoted through periodical events and festivals that will not only attract people from outside, but offer local residents recreational opportunities and enhance local recreational amenities.

### Planning and Design guidelines

Further details on how the system should be planned and designed are to be developed through an in-depth planning process that will engage the local community; in this way, the system's design can incorporate every form of local knowledge and community material and non-material resources and, also, it will promote a sense of ownership within the community.

Each section will connect two major nodes that are points of attraction and/or significance (a tentative map is attached).

Different sections can also imply a different level of community *engagement*, while the implementation of specific sections can be promoted by targeted community actors, such as: youth groups or schools promoting linear community garden; local cultural or philanthropic organizations promoting urban sections crossing historic districts; etc.

### Suggestion about storm water management improvement

The city has already initiated a plan to conduct a detailed study on how to improve and retrofit the existent storm water management system. This study should take into account the fact that costs for retrofitting existing element of the system and for realizing new ones can be reduced by actions aimed at reducing impervious areas within urban boundaries. This can be done adding specific design guidelines to the city building code, and starting pilot projects for public spaces (court square, streets, etc.).

Sections Typology



**description** | intensively vegetated floodplain, accessible or not accessible to humans, that help to restore wildlife, enhance urban landscape; vegetation can be entirely flooded without great damage.

**context** | non-Urban areas, often including open-air water streams, where specific environmental hazards (flooding but can be something else) are dangerous for people; areas difficult to be acquired and/or used by the public, whose treatment can be determined through land use and codes.



**description** | public linear parks that combine recreational (bike and pedestrian trails) and environmental functions (ecological corridors), furnished with signage.

**context** | non-Urban areas that can include water streams characterized by low environmental risk and are or can easily become public property.



**description** | public linear parks that combine recreational (bike and pedestrian trails) and environmental functions (ecological corridors); can be characterized by the presence of thriving vegetation, especially tree canopy, street furnishing and lighting, etc.

**context** | urban areas that usually include streets, urban creeks and green buffers and that can be transformed to pursue re-naturalization and furnishing.



**description** | dedicated trail for bikers and pedestrians, with appropriate signage and design.

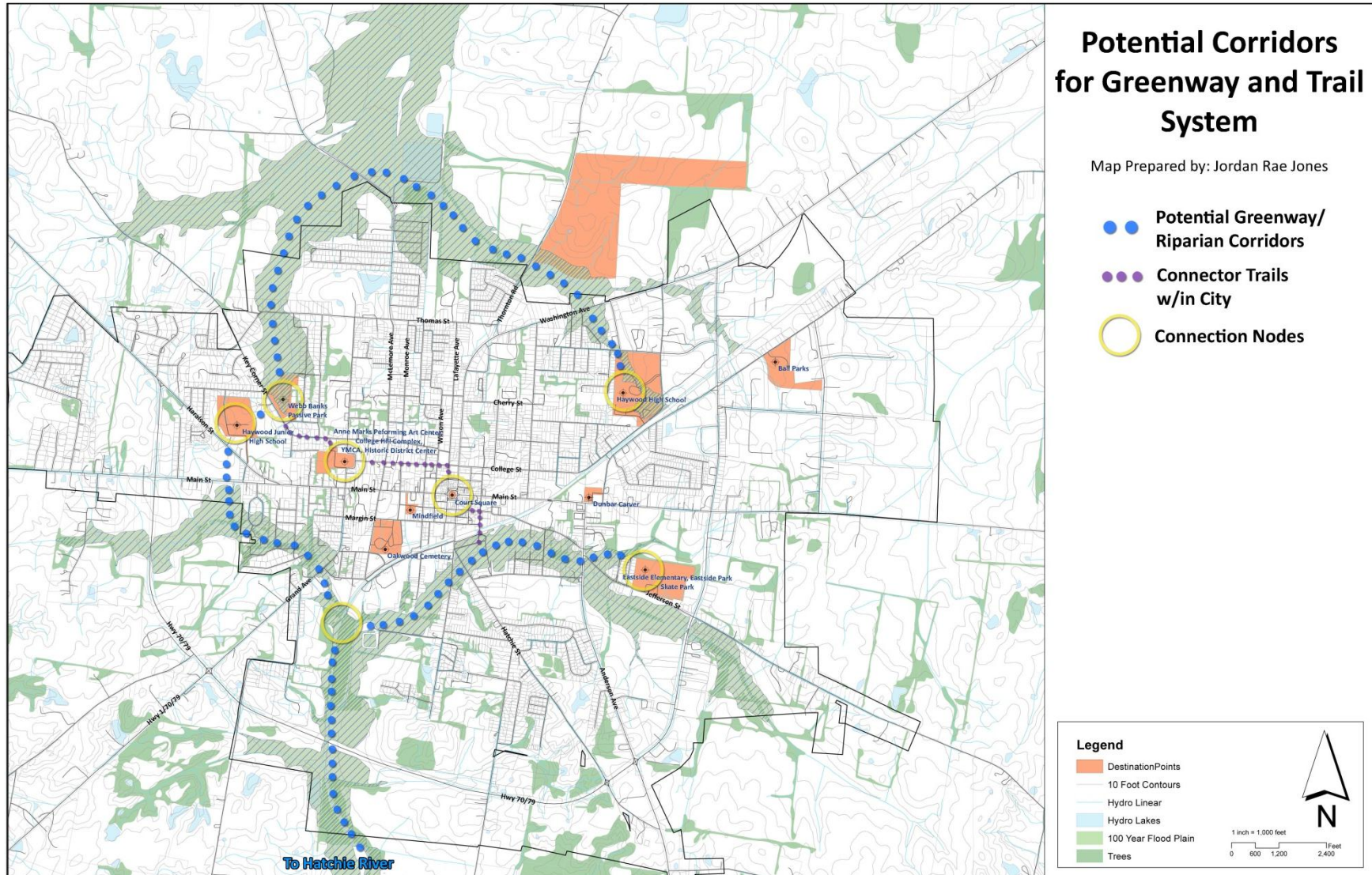
**context** | portions of streets that are large enough to be able to accommodate them.



**description** | horizontal street signage, indicating a dedicated space for bikers.

**context** | portions of streets that are large enough to be able to accommodate them.

Possible structure of sections and nodes to be connected through the system



## 11. Where we go from here?

Based upon feedback received from members of the City Planning Commission, Aldermen, the Director of Planning and Engineering, and the Mayor, the U of M faculty will prepare a fully elaborated draft of the Brownsville on the Move Plan for the October meeting of the City Planning Commission. Following a thorough review of the draft plan by the City Planning Commission, and subsequent vote, the plan will be forwarded to the Aldermanic Council for review, discussion, and vote. The Aldermanic Council will hold one or more public hearings on the plan and take a vote. If adopted the plan will be forwarded to the county which will look at the plans intergovernmental implications and the State where it will undergo an environmental and historical preservation review. Provided the state finds no serious problems with the document, local officials will file the plan with the Haywood County Clerk and begin to make decisions based upon its major policy and planning proposals.

Once the plan has been adopted, the City should consider establishing a Steering Committee to guide its implementation. This body could be a sub-committee either of the City Planning Commissioner or Aldermanic Council and would be responsible for advancing the implementation of the plan. As the City enters the implementation process, it should identify the kinds of technical assistance and training required to successfully undertake the plan's major elements. One of the topics the City should consider addressing as part of this capacity-building efforts is diversity training to address real and perceived barriers to inclusion that

may hinder its future economic and community development efforts. Feedback offered by residents representing both the African American and Latino/a communities suggested that despite considerable progress on race relations; additional progress needs to be made to transform Brownsville into “the beloved community”. Specific measures aimed at promoting social equity and mutual understanding should be incorporated into the policy and plan implementation sections of each of plan's seven development objectives.

## 12. For More Information

Please visit the Brownsville on the Move website at: [www.brownsvilleonthemove.org](http://www.brownsvilleonthemove.org) or contact:

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