UGA Business Students Recommend Plans to Revitalize Downtown Dalton
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Seeking to boost its economy and create a thriving downtown area where residents could live, work, and play, the Dalton-Whitfield Archway Partnership’s Vibrant Downtown Work Group called on graduate students from the UGA Terry College of Business to assist in researching and providing information needed for a business plan to revitalize the downtown Dalton area.

As part of the project, the students studied similar, thriving cities to identify best practices and potential obstacles to business recruitment. The students researched potential businesses that the Downtown Dalton Development Authority identified in its business recruitment plan to see what attracted these businesses to similar communities. They also identified factors that may hinder downtown growth such as retention of local small businesses and restrictive policies.

Ultimately, the research showed that residents should find going downtown to be an “experience” with activities that are engaging for 4–6 hours. According to the students’ findings, this could be done by bringing medium and high-end retail, hotels/housing, historical attractions, additional green space, cultural arts, and entertainment to downtown Dalton. The utilization of social networking sites and downtown events that attract a youthful audience were two key elements identified through the study for growing the downtown. Current factors that may limit downtown activity are the lack of national chains in the downtown area and inconvenient business hours.

The Archway Vibrant Downtown Work Group has considered a variety of data, including a property inventory; a leakage report from the Electric Cities of Georgia; concept drawings from UGA’s College of Environmental Design; and ideas, proposals, and planning documents for downtown Dalton created by Savannah College of Art and Design’s Fall 2010 Urban Planning course. In cooperation with Dalton State College students, the Work Group surveyed over 500 concerned Dalton-Whitfield citizens to identify what businesses they would like to see downtown, and what feedback they could give on how to make downtown Dalton a better place to visit. Approximately 25 business owners with current downtown businesses were also surveyed about their concerns with downtown Dalton, and were asked what changes were needed. These resources, along with the research and recommendations from the business students, will assist the Work Group in creating plans for a downtown that is economically sound and popular for both residents and visitors.

Advancing Community Priorities: Revitalizing Downtown Dalton was identified as a priority by the Dalton-Whitfield Archway Partnership through the community visioning process. The information gathered provides local leaders with several action steps for enhancing the downtown area.