

# Lamar Community Planning Project Next Steps 2018

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The Town of Lamar is an amazing pedestrian friendly community made possible by the grid pattern of streets established by the railroad tracks laid down in the late 1890s and early 1910s.

### Demographic Analysis

Despite an 18% increase in population growth in the 1960s and 1970s, Lamar has experienced consistent population decline (roughly -2.6%) over the last twenty years while Darlington County and the State of South Carolina has experienced population growth.

### Visual Reconnaissance Analysis

The Town of Lamar is a very pedestrian friendly community with a historically significant housing stock within easy walking distance to Main Street's grocery store, bank, post office, retail, and restaurants.

### Next Step Planning Suggestions

#### Making Main Street More Distinct

1. Main Street Revitalization
  - Building upgrades and sidewalk enhancements
2. Unity Park
  - Greening Main Street with Unity Park
3. Expand public art initiative on Main Street
  - Expanding public art with murals on Main Street
4. Façade improvement program
  - Funding strategies for façade improvement projects

#### Community Liveability Improvements Projects (CLIP)

5. Accessibility to health services
  - Connecting rural health care with transit services
6. Healthy homes
  - Combatting lead based paint (LBP)
7. Senior tax abatement
  - Elderly on fixed income upkeep and mortgage payments

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## I. Introduction

The Lamar Community Planning Project started with a suggestion that the Clemson University Master in City and Regional Planning Program (MCRP) look into a community planning class project in Lamar, South Carolina. The suggestion to work with Lamar was followed-up with a phone conversation with Lamar's Mayor, Darnell Byrd-McPherson, and a month later a formal meeting with the Mayor and Lamar community leaders. MCRP has conducted community development projects as part of its graduate curriculum experience dating back to 1970 and include projects such as Reedy River Project in Greenville, affordable housing plan in Spartanburg, and community development in Cadillac Heights in Clemson. The Lamar Community Planning Project is one example of how City and Regional Planning graduate students apply advanced planning expertise and research techniques to inform South Carolina residents about potential community planning projects as part of the Land-Grant mission of Clemson University.

The report is divided into two halves: research strategy and "next step" planning suggestions. The research strategy section discusses two research projects: demographic analysis and visual reconnaissance analysis. The demographic analysis looked at the evolution of Lamar's population over the last 50 years in relation to the region and state. The visual reconnaissance investigation combined drone imagery 400 feet above ground perspectives with eye-level photographic research. The second section provides next step planning suggestions based on the two research strategies. There are two next-step planning suggestions: a.) making Main Street more distinct, and b.) Community Livability Improvement Projects (CLIP).

### Lamar's Urban Morphology

In addition to having a strong, vibrant, and wonderfully diverse community of residents, the morphology of the town (organization of streets and composition of buildings) are amazingly well established for a town of its size. Determining Lamar's morphology required a little extra digging into the history of Lamar. According to The South Carolina Historical Commission, Lamar has a long history of main street development. Initially becoming a town in the late 1880s, its biggest boost to the economy first came in the 1890s with the "expanding of the

interstate rail network when the rails of the Charleston, Sumter and Northern Railroad were laid through town – connecting Darlington with Sumter (and) the coming of the second railroad in 1913, connecting Hartsville with Bishopville and Timmons ville” (dchglog.net/2016/03/24/lamar-lisbo). The railroad track was set in the heart of town with a grid-pattern of roads radiating out and around the tracks. The grid-pattern of streets literally set the “Towns by the Track” urban morphology for Lamar that will pay community planning dividends over next 100 years. A grid pattern of streets is common practice in “Towns by the Track” early town planning done by railroad companies in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Reps, 1981, pp.76-121). The “Towns by the Tracks” observation is confirmed with Main Street bisected by North Railroad Avenue that is one block off from Depot Drive that wraps around Piggley Wiggley and Carolina Bank and Trust. (See Figure 1. Lamar.)



*Figure 1. Lamar Main Street “around 1911 (dchglog, 2016).*

Main Street commerce was very strong in Lamar dating back to the 1920s. The image of McSween Mercantile Company taken “around 1920” shows the size and sophistication of retail activity on Main Street. (See Figure 2.) (Notice the wide sidewalk in front of the extensive three bays of window shopping displays.)



*Figure 2. McSween Mercantile Company. The building was destroyed by fire in 1970 (dchglog, 2016).*

After World War II, both railroads removed their lines leading into Lamar and were converted in the 1950s into a broad boulevard making Railroad Avenue what we see today. (See Figure 3.)



*Figure 3. Main Street and Railroad Avenue.*

The combination of amazing community spirit with a physical town of very strong urban morphology handed down over a hundred years ago provides the point of departure for this community planning investigation.



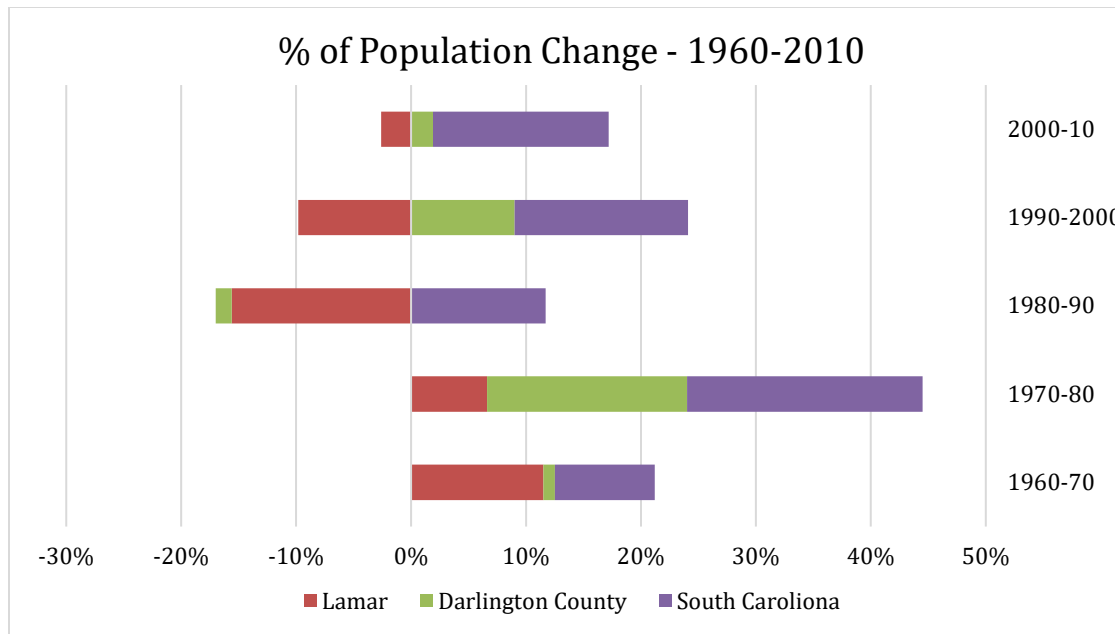
## **II. Research Strategy**

### **A. Demographic Analysis**

The demographic analysis looked at U.S. census data for the Town of Lamar and its immediate region from 1960 to 2010. Two questions are applied in this regional 50-year longitudinal analysis: A.) How has Lamar's population changed in comparison to the region? And, B.) Looking at the age of population, is Lamar total population growing older or younger?

#### Lamar's Population Change Within the Region

Despite an 18% population growth in the 1960s and 1970s, Lamar has experienced a modest population decline since 1980. From 2000 to 2010, Lamar's total population declined by -2.6%. In contrast, the state of South Carolina has shown a steady population growth since 1960, growing by over 15% since 2000 (US Census, 2010). Darlington County, where Lamar is located, has experienced moderate population growth except during the 1980s, where population declined by -1.4%. Since that time, Darlington County has made up for that decline and increased in population by over 10%. In contrast to gain and then loss of total population in the City of Lamar and Darlington County, the state of South Carolina has seen consistent growth from 1960 to 2010. (See Figure 4.)



*Figure 4. Percent of Population Change in Lamar, Darlington County, and South Carolina US Census, 2010.*

Darlington, the county seat for Darlington County, and Florence, the county seat for Florence County, are the two largest cities near Lamar. It is evident from Figure 5 that population growth in this region of South Carolina has concentrated itself in the City of Florence with the exception of a 0.1% decline in the 1980s, while Lamar and Darlington have experienced consistent population decline since the 1980s. In the 2000s, this decline lessened to less than 3% for both cities, in contrast to prior decades where decline was well over 5% for Lamar and 10% for Darlington.

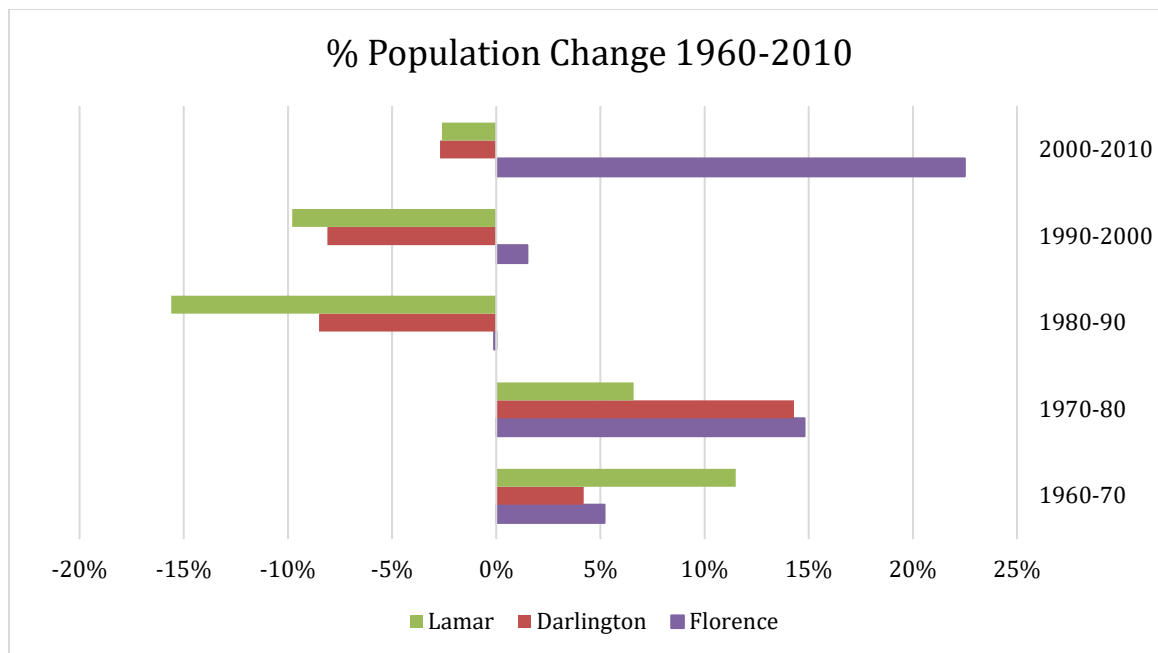


Figure 5. Percent of Population in Lamar, Darlington, Florence, US Census, 2010.

The exact breakdown for the population increase in Florence and the decline in Darlington and Lamar is shown in Table 1. Once again, Florence has experienced a consistent population increase, and Lamar and Darlington have experienced a decline since the 1980s.

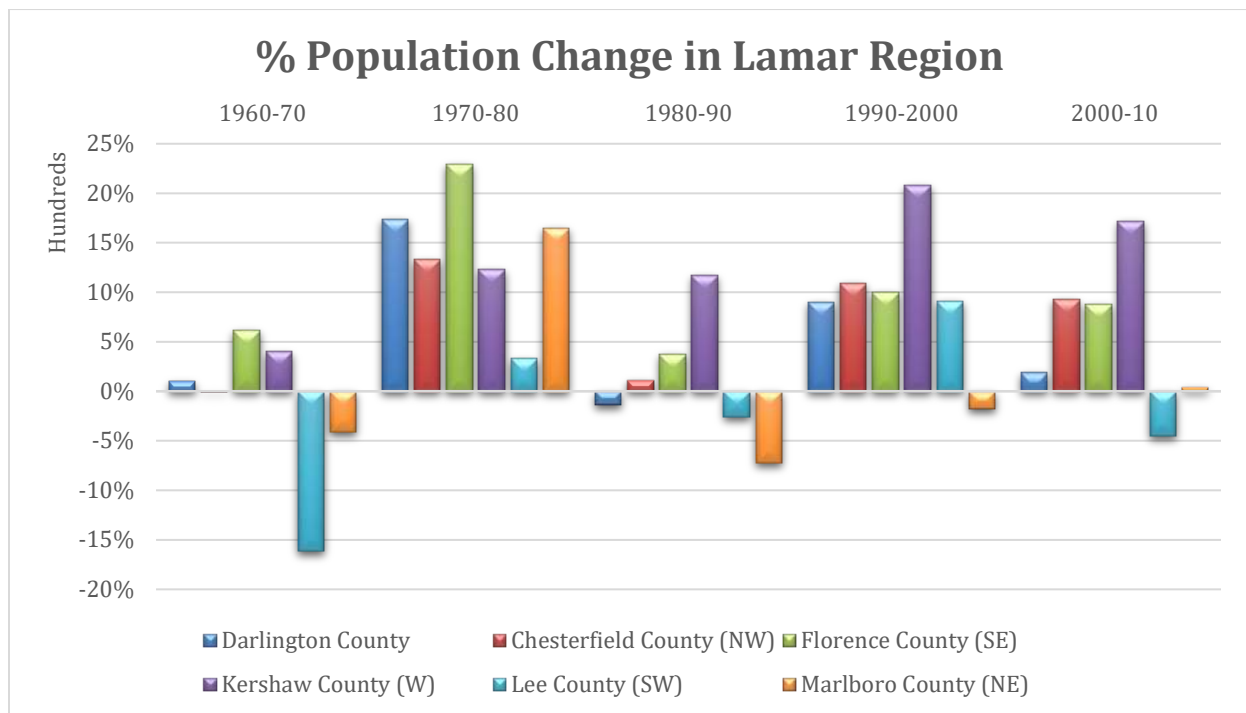
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	Total Change
Florence	24,722	25,997	29,842	29,813	30,248	37,056	12,334
Darlington	6,710	6,990	7,989	7,311	6,720	6,289	-421
Lamar	1,121	1,250	1,333	1,125	1,015	989	-132

Table 1. Total Population in Lamar, Darlington, and Florence. US Census, 2010.

Figure 6 gives a breakdown of the percentage of population change of counties in the Lamar region, from 1960-2010. All counties in the Lamar region significantly grew in population in the 1970s, with most counties continuing to grow in the years following. Darlington, Lee, and Marlboro were all counties where population declined more than it grew since the 1970s. Florence, Chesterfield, and Kershaw counties all have grown since the 1970s and have not experienced any population decline.

These counties' growth in the 1970s can most likely be attributed to South Carolina's economic growth strategy implemented in the late 1960s and 1970s. During that time the state switched from a primarily agricultural economy to one focused on industry and foreign investment. Florence and Darlington County are close to the intersection of I-95 and I-20, which can explain their population growth. (See Figure 7.) Chesterfield County is 1 hour away from Charlotte, NC, and has absorbed that region's growth over the last several years. Kershaw is outside of Columbia, SC and has absorbed some of that area's growth.

*Figure 6. Population Change in Lamar Region, US Census, 2010.*



*Figure 6 Population Change in Lamar Region, US Census, 2010.*

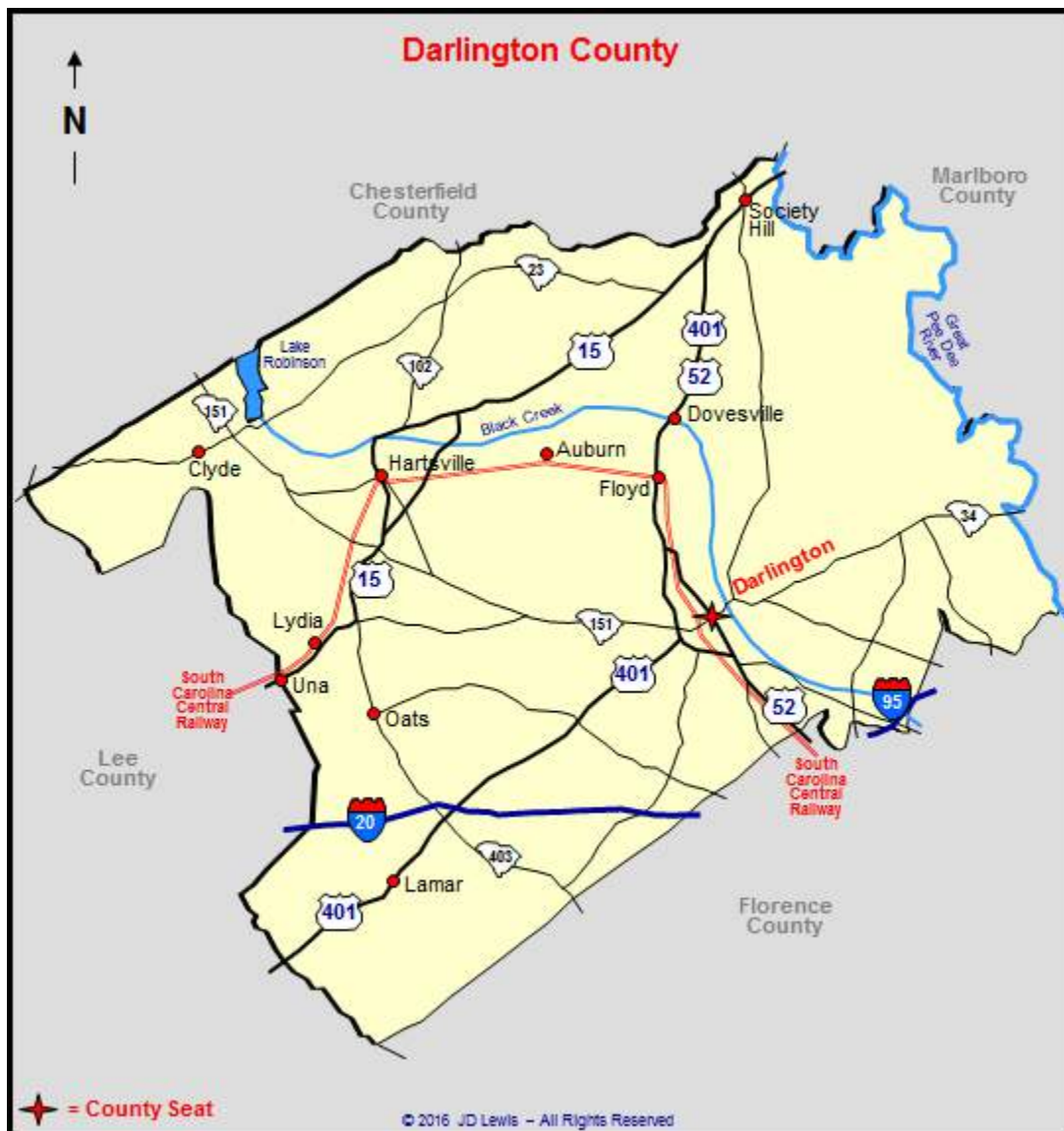


Figure 7, Lamar within Darlington County.

Figure 9 shows the actual population numbers for counties in the Lamar region, from 1960-2010. Florence is clearly the most populated county, with just over 130,000 people in 2010. Lee County is consistently the least populated, with around 20,000 people. Darlington County, where Lamar is located, is second in population to Florence at around 68,000 people, but closer in number to Kershaw County, which had almost 62,000 people in 2010.

Figure 8. Total Population for Counties in Lamar Region: 1960-2010. US Census, 2010.

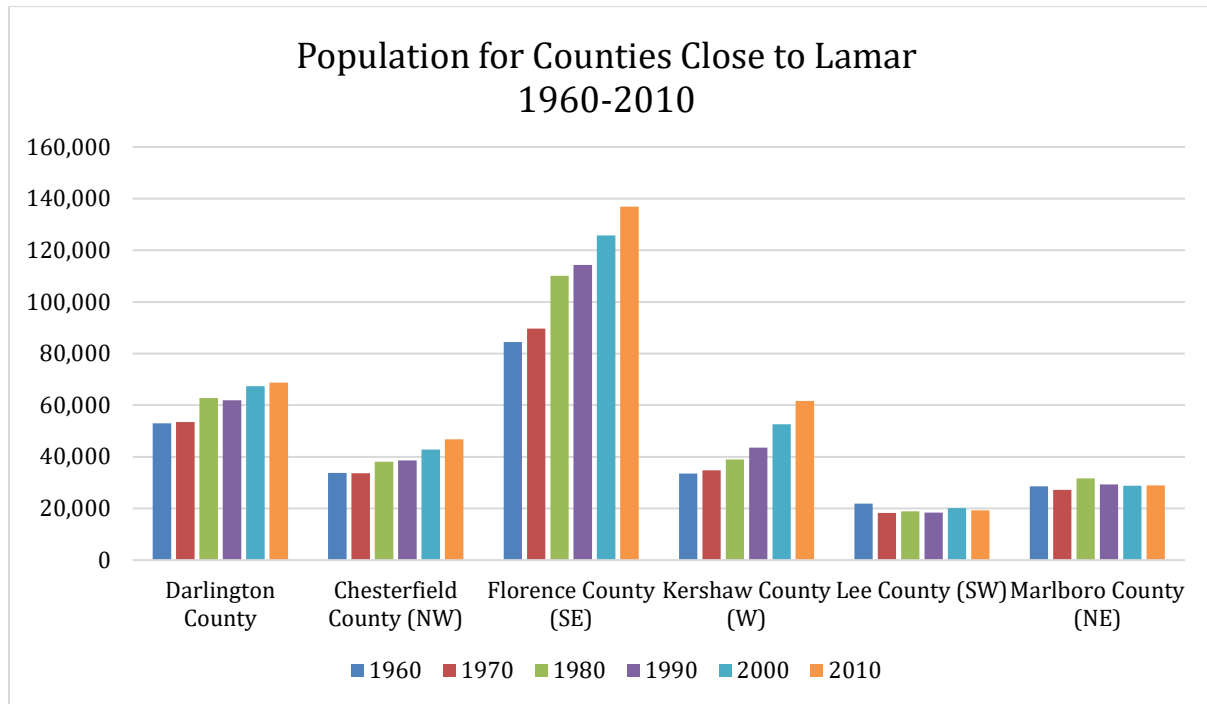
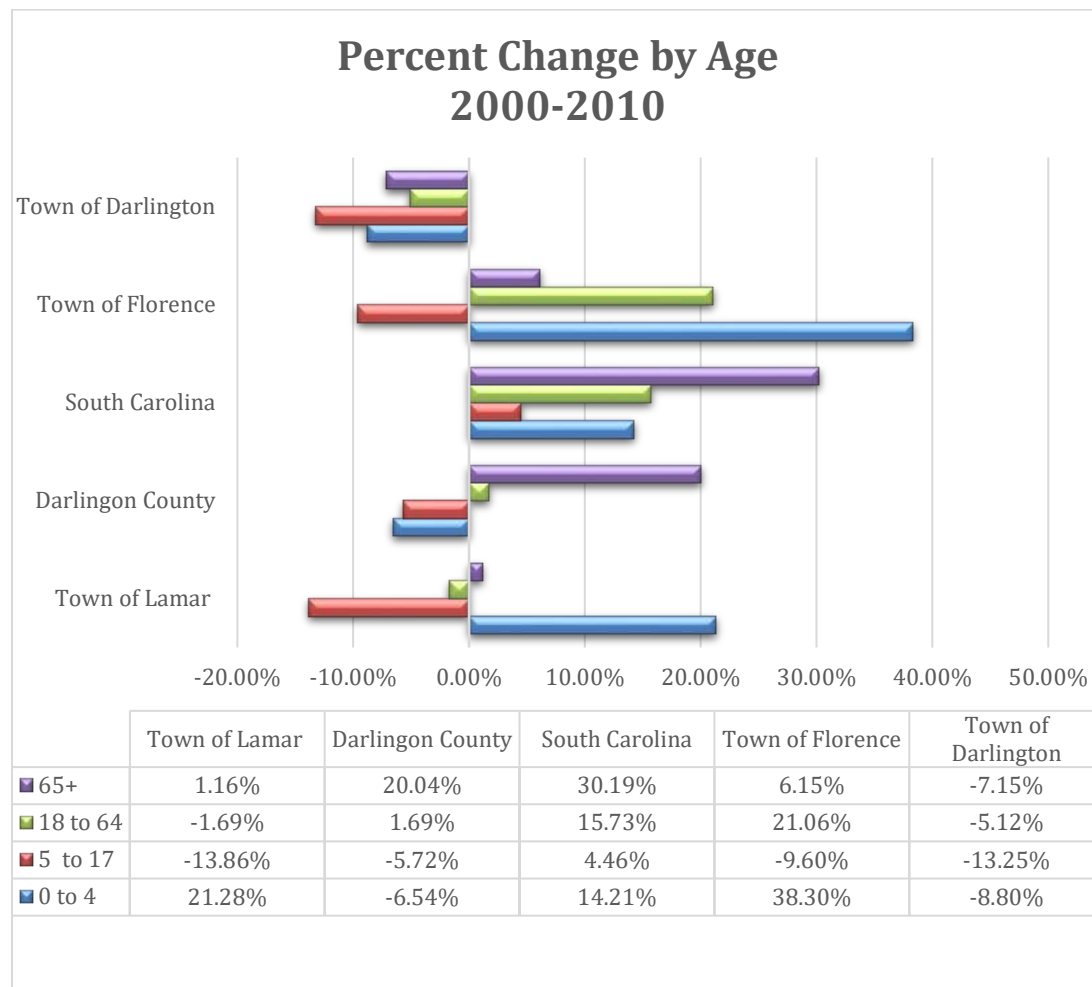


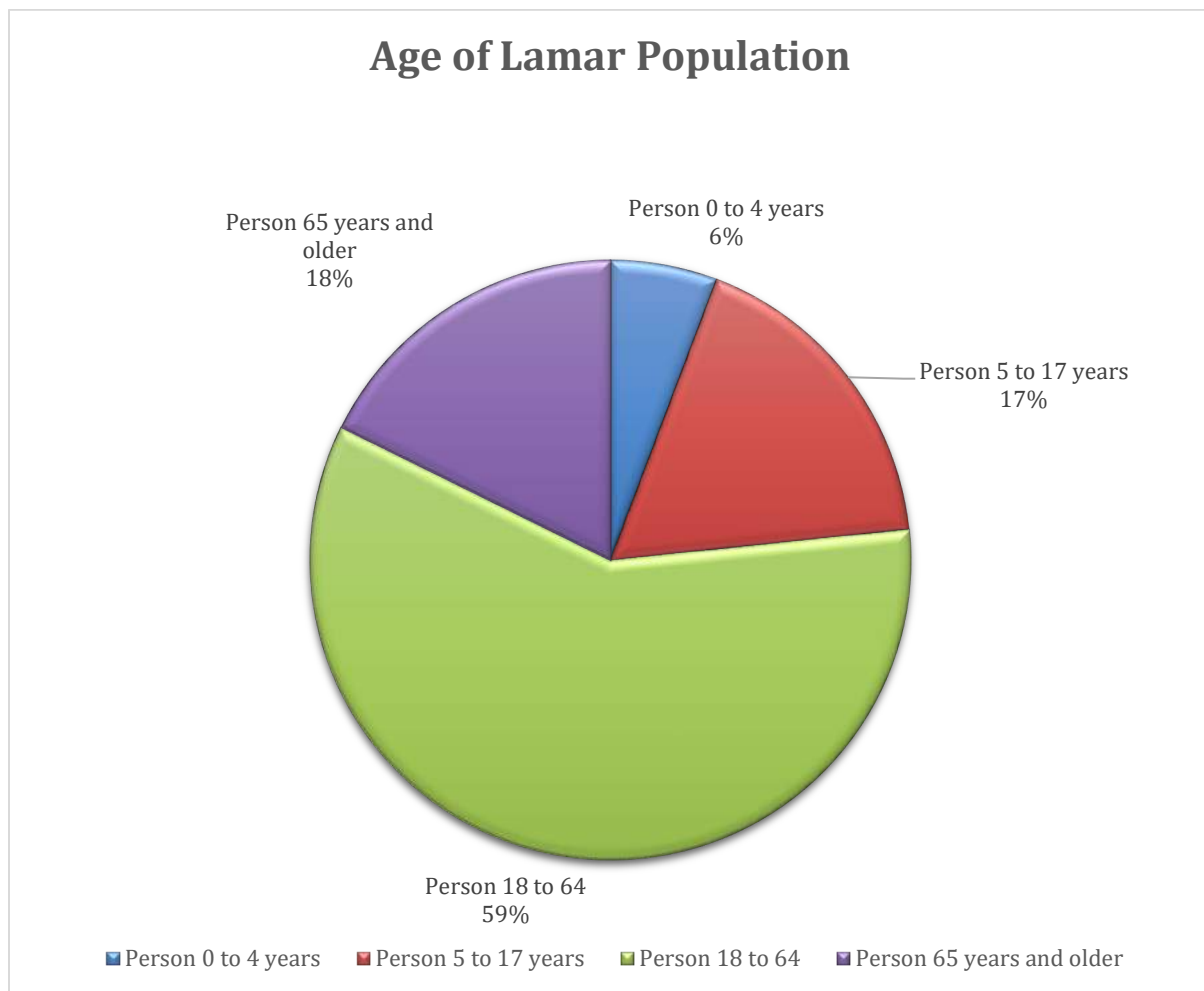
Figure 8. Total Population for Counties in Lamar Region: 1960-2010. US Census, 2010.

## Analysis of Age in Lamar



*Figure 9. Percent Change by Age: 2000-2010. Source: US Census Data.*

With the population decline in Lamar, there was a loss of 13.86% percent of their residents aged 5 to 17, and a loss of 1.69% of their residents aged 18 to 64 (See Figure 9.). On the opposite end of the spectrum, the community had a 21.28% population increase of residents in the age of 0 to 4. It can be inferred that the people who live in Lamar are having children and then moving away or grandparents are raising young grandchildren. In addition, there was a 1.16% increase in the population of residents 65 and up. The Lamar community is getting smaller but also ageing in place and becoming older. Ageing in place is a trend occurring not only in Lamar but across Darlington County and South Carolina, with 20.04% and 30.19% increases, respectively.



*Figure 10. Age of Lamar Population. US Census, 2010.*

As noted by the pie chart above (Figure 10), 59% of the population is aged 18 to 64 with 18% being aged 65+. The Lamar Community needs to address its ageing population as the people in the 18 to 64 group move into 65+. Age is an important factor to understand how city services can best serve their population. An ageing community tend to have higher needs for such services as access to affordable transportation to health care, affordable home repair, and maintenance programs.



## B. Visual Reconnaissance Analysis

A combination of drone aerial footage and eye-level images were taken for the visual reconnaissance analysis. Lamar's Main Street was used as a centerpoint for the reconnaissance analysis with all images taken in and immediately round this area. Drone footage was taken at three different elevations: high elevation (400 feet), middle elevation (200 feet), and, low elevation (100 feet). High elevation drone images were taken to show Main Street in relation to a larger regional perimeter (roughly 1 mile in diameter from Main Street). Middle elevation images were taken to show co-location of buildings in relation to significant intersections. Low elevation images were taken to show finer-grain detail of buildings roadway infrastructure capacity and site specific characteristics (e.g. curbscuts).

### Drone aerial reconnaissance

Three observations are made from the drone aerial footage. First, the Town of Lamar was planned at its early beginnings and has an established grid-pattern of streets. As shown in Figure 11, evidence of this is the Town being anchored with a wide and straight Main Street bisected by cross streets that extends a grid pattern of streets in East and West directions.



*Figure 11. Grid pattern of streets*

The second observation is that there are two Main Streets (Figure 12): a Northeast dense commercial corridor (right-side of the street) and a Southwest significantly less density mixed-use corridor (left-side of the street). Any new built developments will most likely take place on the handful of undeveloped open spaces on the Southwest side of Main Street. Façade and

storefront restoration will most likely take place on the Southeast side of Main Street.



*Figure 12. Two Main Streets.*

Lastly, Main Street is very accessible to the entire community making the Town of Lamar a very pedestrian friendly community. Pedestrian friendly cities are an extremely rare commodity in the current “car-oriented” American urban fabric which well positions Lamar for future residential development among seniors and young families.

The anatomy of Lamar’s

pedestrian friendly community is made up of three parts: a.) Main Street in close walking distance to housing (See Figure 13), b.) high density Main Street commercial corridor that literally has everything a family needs: grocery store, bank, post office, Lamar Library, government offices including police and fire, retail, gas stations, and restaurants (See Figure 12, and 13.) and, c.) Main Street in easy walking distance to local schools and recreational facilities (See Figure 14).



*Figure 13. Main Street easy walking distant to residential.*



*Figure 14. Main Street easy walking distant to schools.*

## Eye-level reconnaissance

Two observations were derived from the eye-level reconnaissance investigation: pedestrian friendly community and very strong housing stock. In confirmation to the drone investigation, the eye-level reconnaissance provides more detailed observations that Lamar is a great pedestrian friendly community. Lamar has an abundant supply of sidewalks connecting residents to Main Street and connecting neighborhoods to each other (Figure 15). A tremendous amount of



research documents several benefits to sidewalks: a.) support of healthy lifestyles of walking and bicycling that are a valuable infrastructure needed in the fight against diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, b.) public safety and lower crime rates with more “eyes” on the street, and c.) stronger community ties with people being better connected through walking and other modes of transportation (Figure 16).



*Figure 15. Sidewalk connecting neighborhoods.*



*Figure 16. Strong pedestrian communities support alternative modes of transportation.*

Second, Lamar has a strong housing stock made up of multiple generations of housing types in well-established neighborhoods. Many of the homes were built before 1940 and are wonderfully embraced by matured trees. (See Figure 17 and Figure 18).



*Figure 17. Pre-1940 housing stock.*



*Figure 18. Mature trees.*

Some of the houses are in need of significant restoration and repair. However, many of the homes that are in need of repair can be seen as real estate development opportunities. Several of these homes are historically significant that are situated on highly desirable lots. A modest restoration investment can turn many of these homes into beautiful, spacious homes in easy walking distance to Main Street, churches and schools. (See Figure 19.)



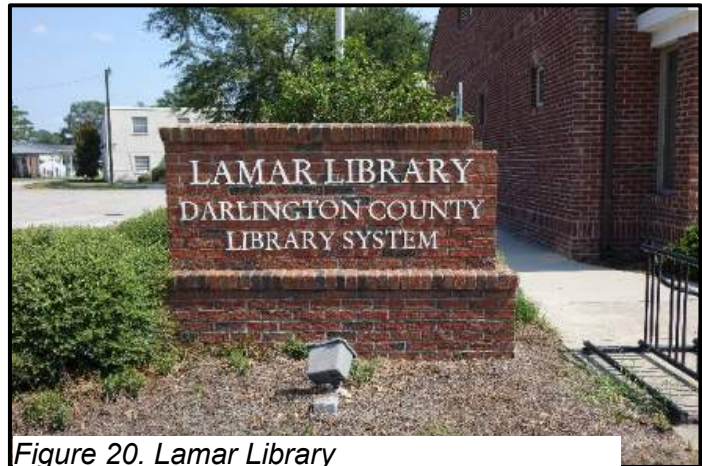
*Figure 19. Historically significant home in need of renovation.*



### III. Next Step Planning Suggestions

#### Introduction

The Town of Lamar is small (2010 total population of 989), but it is a mighty community with an amazing history of working together to achieve shared goals as evidenced in their Main Street public beautification project, downtown public art, and culminating with the community initiated,



*Figure 20. Lamar Library*

funded, and built Lamar Library in 2003 that was expanded in 2015. (See Figure 20.).

The point of departure of the next step community planning recommendations are based on the empirical findings discussed in the research strategy section of this report. The following five data points provide the foundation for the recommendations:

- The Town of Lamar is experiencing modest population decline (-2.6%) beginning in 2000 while the county, region, and state have experienced significant population increases.
- Lamar's community is growing both slightly younger (0 to 4) at 21% and older (65 and older) at 1% since 2000. A growing elderly population (65 and older) are anticipated in the next few decades with over 59% of Lamar's total population aged 18 to 64.
- The Town of Lamar is a wonderful pedestrian friendly city with everything in easy walking distance to Main Street connected via a grid pattern of streets with sidewalks.
- Lamar has an amazing Main Street that holds a tremendous amount of opportunity for future development.
- The Town of Lamar has a very strong and historically significant housing stock.

Based on the demographic and visual reconnaissance analysis, the MCRP students developed 7 next step community planning projects that are organized into two general themes:

#### Making Main Street More Dinstinct

1. Main Street revitalization approach
2. Unity Park
3. Expand public art initiative on Main Street
4. Facade improvement program

#### Community Liveability Improvements Projects (CLIP)

5. Acessibility to health services
6. Healthy homes
7. Elderly taxabetment program



## **Making Main Street More Distinct**

### **1. Main Street Revitalization Approach**

The Lamar Main Street is a good place to develop shared community projects. The revitalization of Lamar's Main Street may be able to garner more visitors and use by residents.

While revitalization is often affiliated with high expenses there are many easily affordable solutions that can be added to Lamar's Main Street corridor. Two suggestions are provided here: A.) suggested building upgrades, and B.) sidewalk enhancements.

#### **A. Suggested Building Upgrades**

Most of the Main Street buildings are well-kept and appear to maintain occupancy. First, continue adding awnings to Main Street buildings. (See Figure 21.) Awnings provide many attributes to pedestrians such as shelter from sun and rain. They also can conserve energy from the storefront. It appears many buildings use a green awning; however, these could be extended to welcome residents to a larger area.



*Figure 21. Main Street awnings.*

While some businesses have awnings, others do not. This separation could signal to the public a “closed shop.” (See Figure 22.)



*Figure 22. "Closed shop" on Main Street*

An accessible way to establish your downtown corridor would be to embrace the historic appearance of your buildings. By utilizing the brick buildings, you can connect the residents with your community's history. When recommending affordable design elements, we also suggest elements that will help embrace Lamar's historic community. It is important to continue to foster this historic area because it can provide residents with a sense of ownership. Continue using brick exteriors and using original paint colors for repainting existing buildings and when new buildings are built. By retaining the original colors and textures it helps commemorate the town's history.

## **B. Sidewalk Enhancements**

U.S. Route 401 (Main Street) passing through Lamar is a great access point; however, because the road can attract traffic from afar, it is vital that pedestrians feel safe. Harboring a safe walkway can encourage pedestrians to use the space more. To foster a welcoming environment for your residents, Lamar may consider these upgrades to roads and sidewalks.

Sidewalks are integral to the health of the tenants of each building. Without proper access they cannot function. Fortunately, Lamar provides walkable sidewalks for your residents that appear to meet ADA guidelines in most areas. They are wide and provide access to each building along the road. Additionally,

Lamar has designated walkways that connect sidewalks over the streets. These areas appear to be well lit by street lighting that nurtures safety.

By providing safety to pedestrians you can further ensure utility of these great sidewalks. One nice touch already incorporated are the large planters filled with shrubs and large trash cans. By using large ornamental planters (3-4 feet tall), you are providing your pedestrians a barrier from the road. This can facilitate a feeling of safety and encourage walking along Main Street. Unfortunately, there are only a few scattered along the road. By adding more planters and trash cans you would be facilitating a barrier and providing an enclosed feeling for residents.

Planting trees, like in front of the business “Porters”, also provides visually appealing design elements that integrate safety. By adding more trees along the Main Street, Lamar could emphasize the safety of pedestrians. The building to the right in Figure 23 is one open space that has space for and would benefit from the addition of trees. In addition to providing safety, Lamar can further promote the historic elements of your area by using cast-iron bases. When planting vegetation, it is recommended that Lamar use low-maintenance plants. This also will assist in storm water maintenance, as the pervious surface will help retain the water and infiltrate into the soil instead of running off into the street and sewer system. The addition of trees, shrubbery, and flowers can have a profound impact on giving Main Street a sense of place. It would add color to the downtown and make it seem more welcoming.



*Figure 23. Main Street possible site for tree plantings.*

## **Making Main Street More Distinct**

### **2. Unity Park**

A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association<sup>1</sup> studying the effect ‘greening’ of vacant land in Philadelphia found that feelings of depression and self-reported poor mental health declined significantly in people who lived near green lots compared to those who lived near lots that had received no care. These beneficial medical effects were achieved with very minimal financial investments into the lots ‘greening’ and improvements. The lots in the study received a minimal treatment of trash pickup, grass and minimal tree plantings, and a low wooden fence to delineate the area costing between \$1,000-\$3,000.

Lamar can make similar investments on a vacant site located on Main Street located next to Lamar Appliances and Home Services. (See Figures, 24, 25, and 26.) The site consists of two parcels of land totaling 0.46 acres located in an area highly accessible by foot or vehicle near the intersection of Main Street and Boykin Ave and a short walk from the municipal and commercial buildings along Main St. Any residents visiting the post office or driving through Main Street on the way to work see the site multiple times daily. Creating what the MCRP students call “Unity “Park” in this location would provide a highly visible and much frequented civic area in the heart of Lamar.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2688343>





Figure 24 Unity Park site view A.



Figure 25 Unity Park site view B.



Figure 26 Unity Park site view C.

The site for Unity Park does however have a few limitations. The most significant of which are multiple monitoring wells located around the site. These monitoring wells will need to be preserved for future monitoring. Secondly, a dirt road cut through has been established through the site for vehicles accessing parking and business entrances on the alley west of Main Street. As part of the park development, clear boundaries to the park using low shrubs should be established on the western border to slow vehicle traffic around the site.

Our proposal for a Unity Park on Main Street in Lamar envisions a green site with a central pergola with several native trees<sup>2</sup>, low hedge borders to define the park perimeter, several benches, and a mural painted on the side of the Lamar Appliance and Home Services building. One example of a pergola from a Fort Belvoir, Virginia municipal park is shown in Figure 26.



*Figure 26 Fort Belvoir, Virginia*

Community events and initiatives are the “social storefronts” that feature a town’s vibrancy and the quality of life it can offer. These opportunities allow community members to utilize their creativity, help their neighbor, or greet a newcomer improve the town’s civic infrastructure, and ultimately reminds citizens that they

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<sup>2</sup> For a list of recommended native trees see:  
<https://www.state.sc.us/forest/urbsg04.htm#mrec>.

themselves are what make their town great. Unity Park provides a Main Street place that welcomes everyone to share their Lamar community connection.

A significant concern for future development of the Unity Park site at 105 Main Street is the fact that the site was a past convenience store and automobile filling station. The site currently has three underground storage tanks (UST) and twenty-six monitor wells, which have required environmental monitoring through conducting 96-Hour Aggressive Fluid Vapor Recovery (AFVR) events. See Appendix A for more detail about management of petroleum releases and their possible threats to human health and the environment. In our read of the “Report of Comprehensive Groundwater Sampling event, September 2018 report,” it appears that future development on the site that does not disturb the existing treated USTs and monitoring wells most likely will not pose a threat to human health. The addition of native landscaping and trees will in fact serve to help remediate past environmental impacts to the site.

#### Potential Grants for Funding

- Central Carolina Community Foundation - Connected Communities Grants
  - <https://www.yourfoundation.org/nonprofits/grant-opportunities/connected-communities-grants>
- South Carolina Inland Port
  - <http://www.scspa.com/our-impact/community/community-giving-program/>
- SC Parks and Rec - Destination-Specific Tourism Marketing Grant
  - <https://www.scprrt.com/tourism/grants/destination-specific-tourism-marketing-grant>



### 3. Expand Public Art Initiative on Main Street

The expansion of public art into Main Street will provide additional opportunity for Lamar to redefine itself and look forward. Simple public art such as painted urban walls can have a visual transformational impact in a town. Public art (especially in the form of murals) is appearing across the United States<sup>3</sup> as cities and towns attempt to create a new sense of ‘place’ in their urban core.

Lamar already has public art on Main Street. The building shown in Figure 28 is located across Main Street from the New Dragon Chinese Restaurant. As you head south east down Main Street, this mural sticks out because it is immediately after an empty lot. This allows the mural to “pop.” Another example of public art on Main Street is at the Piggly Wiggly. Unfortunately, as seen to the right, tree plantings have been planted in front of some of the murals at the Piggly Wiggly. It is important to take tree plantings into consideration when considering the location of public art on Main Street.



*Figure 28. Lamar Main Street mural*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://opticosdesign.com/blog/the-power-of-public-art-murals/>





*Figure 29. Piggly Wiggle mural*



*Figure 30. Planting in front of Piggly Wiggly Mural*

Two examples of the impact of murals on Main Street are LaBelle, Florida and Laurel, Mississippi. The town of LaBelle in south Florida had a rather dilapidated main street. One of the companies in town, that is well known for their honey business, decided to paint a mural on the side of their building. That mural and building are now a staple of downtown LaBelle, Florida. (See Figures 29 and 30.)

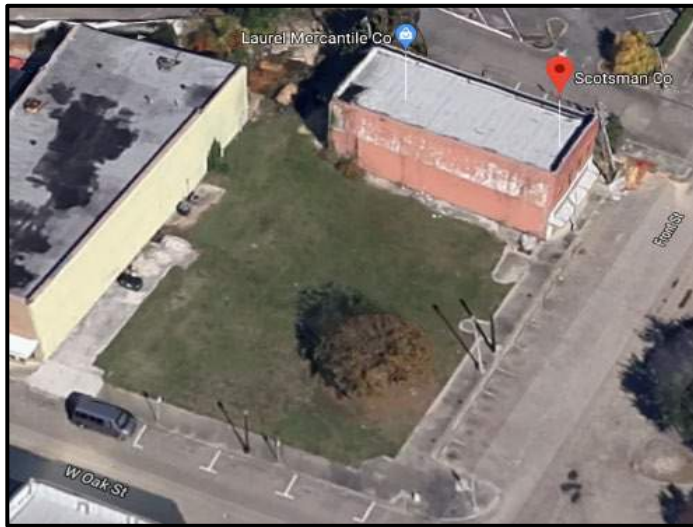


*Figure 31 Honey in LaBelle before.*

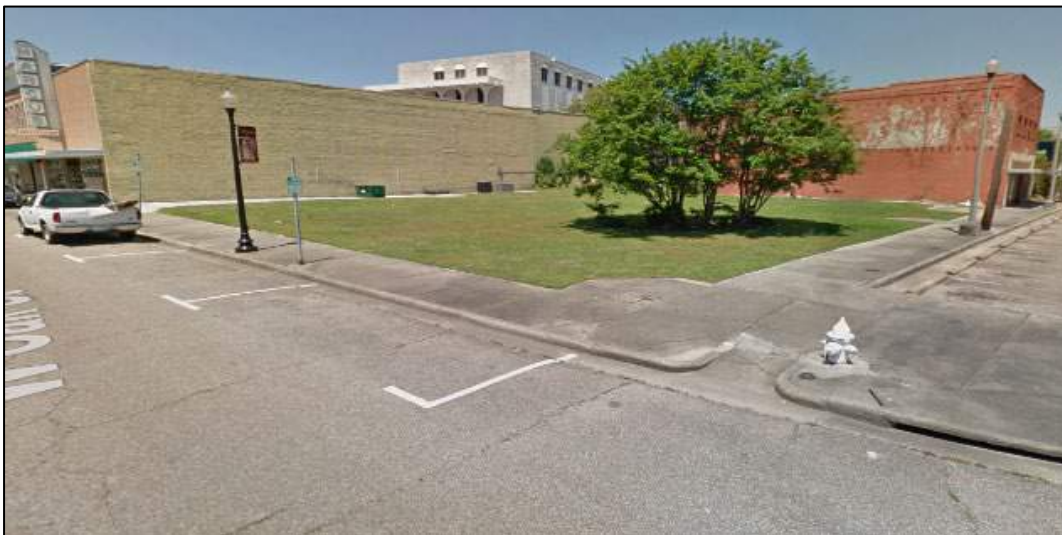


*Figure 32 Honey in LaBelle after.*

The town of Laurel, Mississippi shows the transformational promise of the combining of greening and public art. Laurel has recently gained notoriety through the hit HGTV show 'Home Town'. Though Laurel is a larger town than Lamar, Laurel has been able to undergo a substantial revitalization of its downtown area while retaining its southern charm. The site in question is located along the Amtrak Crescent Line and is a highly visible entrance to the downtown portion of the city. This lot sat vacant for some time, as seen in the images below from Google Maps in 2008. After receiving a needed cleanup, a grass re-seeding, and a fresh coat of paint to the adjacent buildings the lot quickly became a canvas for the two murals that would soon follow. These improvements offer a welcoming photo-op ready gateway for people entering town and provide a colorful backdrop to a greenspace that showcases local artisan talent and help contribute to the rural city charm that has helped Laurel thrive.



*Figure 33 Laurel before.*



*Figure 34 Laurel before.*





Figure 35 Laurel after.

## Making Public Art a Reality on Main Street

The Town of Lamar could coordinate with Lamar High School to paint murals in downtown. Lamar could hold a competition among Lamar High School students to see who could best create a mural that would encompass what they want Lamar to be known for in the future. Not only would an art competition create public participation and enthusiasm in the community, but it would allow a future generation to redefine what Lamar is known for.

One location for future public art installments would be at 108 W Main Street, home of Lamar Appliance & Home Services, the same location we propose for Unity Park. The 108 W Main Street site is located across the street from Carolina Table Manufacturing. This is the first building on the left that you encounter as you enter Lamar's Main Street from the south. The site for the proposed Unity Park is shown to the right. It is right in front of an empty lot as you enter downtown Lamar from the Southeast. This would be the perfect spot for a public art initiative as it is immediately as you enter Lamar. (See Figure 36.) It also has a building face large enough to be able to support a large mural. (See Figure 37.)



*Figure 36 Unity Park Site View D.*

## Funding

There are multiple ways that these projects could be funded. The first consists of passing a percent-for-art ordinance. This method provides funds for public art through the capital improvements division of a municipality. Often, the public art will be commissioned upon the building that is connected to a specific capital project. This method is a good option for funding once Lamar embraces the idea of public art. It will guarantee that public art will be continued in the City. The second method of funding public art is through coordinating with the private development community. Not only would the private development company receive positive recognition in the community for participation, but public art would create an identity for their specific building. And possibly, it could be recognized as the beginning of the public art movement in the given town. Another option for funding public art is through foundation grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). A third option would be establishing parking fees for Lamar's annual Easter Egg Hunt. If they charged a dollar per vehicle, and used 25 cents from that dollar to dedicate



*Figure 37 Possible wall for Lamar mural.*

to funding public art, they would be able to get the ball running on some great projects on Lamar's main street.

## **Making Main Street More Distinct**

### **4. Façade Improvement Program**

Façade improvement programs encourage improvement and investment towards the overall revitalization of an area. These programs are designed to retain and attract businesses, encourage job creation and retention, increase utilization of downtown buildings, restore economic vitality and enhance property values. Façade improvement programs can be developed in a few different manners including forgivable loans or a 50/50 match to commercial property owners and tenants to finance exterior improvements to commercial buildings complimentary to local design guidelines and the respective municipality. The program is a reimbursement program that should contain well defined and enforced criteria based on available funding. Main Street in Lamar, South Carolina would greatly benefit from the development and execution of a façade improvement program. This would help transform the existing aged downtown into a revamped street that would become the city's Main Street a destination. The façade program would not have to be written from scratch, the Town of Lamar could look at existing programs and their different approaches to financing to find a result that would best work for their community.

While the County of Darlington and the Town of Lamar do not yet have their own façade improvement program, within the Town of Darlington, the Downtown Darlington Redevelopment Association (DDRA) has an improvement incentive program.<sup>4</sup> "DDRA will provide up to 50% of the cost of removing or installing an approved sign up to a maximum of \$1,000 and will provide up to 50% of the cost of exterior painting up to a maximum of \$1,000, with a maximum of \$5,000 awarded in a grant cycle". They have several requirements defining the scope of work that they are willing to fund, stating that the funds should fund permanent renovations such as mounted signs and painting, versus temporary signs. DDRA

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<sup>4</sup> "Development." *Downtown Redevelopment – Darlington, SC*,  
[www.buildupdarlington.org/development](http://www.buildupdarlington.org/development).

also gives preference to local, non-chain businesses. While this improvement program limits the scope of work to painting or signage, it is a good basic program to encourage community revitalization.

The City of Pickens has a façade improvement grant program that provides a one-time reimbursement grant of 40% of the project costs, with the maximum reimbursable amount not to exceed \$2,500.<sup>5</sup> This program is limited to their downtown corridor and funds a wide range of enhancements including:

- Exterior painting or surface treatment
- Decorative awnings
- Window and/or door replacements or modifications
- Storefront enhancements
- Landscaping
- Irrigation
- Streetscape
- Outdoor patios and decks
- Exterior wall lighting
- Decorative post lighting and architectural features

Within ten days of completing an application, the City of Pickens informs applicants of their approval. The applicant has ninety days to complete the work in order to get reimbursed. These tight deadlines help the city track their funds and keep the application process moving.

The Greenville County Redevelopment Authority also has a façade improvement grant program. They take a different approach and use Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to provide forgivable loans to façade applicants.<sup>6</sup> These loans have the stipulation that the business must stay in their current location or the applicant will have to repay the loan. While there is not a required funding match, using CDBG funds requires tougher application requirements.<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>5</sup> “Façade Improvement Grant Program.” *City of Pickens, SC*,  
[www.cityofpickens.com/index.asp?SEC=374412F6-9D33-4F3A-B000-2F626F999F8B](http://www.cityofpickens.com/index.asp?SEC=374412F6-9D33-4F3A-B000-2F626F999F8B).

<sup>6</sup> Macauley, Meg. “Façade Improvement Grant Program.” *Greenville County Redevelopment Authority - Affordable Housing - Home Improvement Assistance - GCRA*,  
[www.gcra-sc.org/programs/facade-improvement-grant-program.html](http://www.gcra-sc.org/programs/facade-improvement-grant-program.html).

<sup>7</sup> “Community Development Block Grant Program: Preserving America.” *Housing and Urban*

applicants must provide three third party quotes, proof of liability insurance, and they must create or retain a low income job in addition to the typical application requirements: existing colored photographs of the building with corresponding architectural drawings, a completed W-9, a licensed contractor performing the work, and proof of ownership of the property. This façade improvement grant also requires a title search, environmental review, and in some cases a historic review. The forgivable loan is beneficial, because most applicants can make upgrades to their façade up to \$5,000 without having to match their efforts.

The Town of Lamar can create a façade improvement program for their Main Street corridor based off the examples of other programs to design one that best meets their needs. A façade improvement program should include:

1. “A formal purpose statement that explains why the program was established.
2. A well-defined target area shown on a map or spelled out in clear language.
3. Eligibility criteria and terms for participation which indicate who may participate in the façade improvement program.
4. A list or description of eligible (and ineligible) activities.
5. An emphasis on good design.
6. An application and selection process.”<sup>8</sup>

While the definitions of the program are crucial to its conception, funding is also important. “Larger business improvement districts may be able to raise funds through the annual tax levy, funding is usually obtained from a combination of sources. The most common sources are federal and state grants for community and economic development, housing, and downtown revitalization; and municipal revenue. It is not uncommon for a municipality or organization to work with a consortium of local banks that contribute equally to the funding pool to share investment risks.” With some collaboration the Town of Lamar can creatively pull together funds to create a viable façade improvement program to completely transform their Main Street corridor. The Town of Lamar can also apply to grants

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*Development*, [www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC\\_14211.PDF](http://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC_14211.PDF).

<sup>8</sup> Facca, Amy. “How Façade Improvement Programs Can Benefit Your Community.” *PlannersWeb*, 29 Oct. 2013, [plannersweb.com/2013/10/how-facade-improvement-programs/](http://plannersweb.com/2013/10/how-facade-improvement-programs/).



to raise the funds for community development. There are many grants that Lamar can apply for, one is the Hometown Economic Development Grant sponsored by the Municipal Association of South Carolina. This grant will award up to \$25,000 to a city with a 5% match for cities with a population under 5,000.<sup>9</sup> The grant funds, “Programs developed by a city or in partnership with others including, but not limited to, downtown development or revitalization; business incubators or small business assistance.” A façade improvement program would be a great use of these funds and would only cost the Town up to \$1,250.

## **Two: Community Liveability Improvements Projects (CLIP)**

### **5. Accessibility to Health Services**

Access to affordable health care is crucial for every community. Barriers to healthcare in general are shown in three ways: structural barriers, financial barriers, and/or personal and cultural barriers.<sup>10</sup> Rural communities especially have issues with structural access to healthcare services due to long distances and possibly lack of reliable transportation options. The Rural Health Information Hub recognizes that for a rural community to have adequate healthcare access, a rural resident must have:<sup>11</sup>

- Means to reach and use services, such as transportation to services which may be located at a distance, and the ability to take paid time off of work to use such services.
- Financial means to pay for services, such as health insurance coverage that is accepted by the provider.
- Confidence in their ability to communicate with healthcare providers, particularly if the patient is not fluent in English or has poor health literacy.
- Confidence in their ability to use services without compromising privacy.
- Confidence in the quality of the care that they will receive.

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<sup>9</sup> “Hometown Economic Development Grant Application.” *Municipal Association of South Carolina*, [www.masc.sc/Pages/resources/Economic-Development-Grant-Application.aspx](http://www.masc.sc/Pages/resources/Economic-Development-Grant-Application.aspx).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK235891/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/healthcare-access>

Lamar, South Carolina has one family health care provider: Lamar Family Care Center. Located in the town center at 301 West Main Street, Lamar Family Care Center is fairly accessible for those who can drive, bike, or walk, and is only looking for basic primary care. For those that do not have access to an automobile or who require assistance, Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority (PDRTA) has partnered with Lamar Family Care Center to offer free rides on Mondays and Wednesdays to those that call (843) 665-2227 EXT. 2 one day in advance.

There are two major healthcare centers 20 miles away in Florence: Carolinas Hospital System and McLeod Health. For those able to drive and with access to an automobile, this would take approximately 20 to 30 minutes. However, most people living in rural communities are likely to be older, as South Carolina's elderly population has increased dramatically since 2000,<sup>12</sup> and may not be able to drive themselves 30 minutes.

Medicare and Medicaid attempt to alleviate these transportation barriers by subsidizing non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) services for rural residents but may come with stipulations. For an example, Medicare Part B can potentially cover ambulance services with a written doctor's note saying that ambulance transportation is necessary, the patient needs dialysis, or the patient has kidney issues.<sup>13</sup>

Another option for Lamar residents who cannot travel to a Florence is to utilize technology by utilizing new Telemedicine services. With video conferencing technology like a computer or smart phone, doctors can diagnose patients with the patients never having to leave their house. The services that can be delivered by Telemedicine are:<sup>14</sup>

- Primary care and specialty services providing a live consult with a patient and a provider using live interactive video technology or using a direct-to-consumer web-based application

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/plan/planning/south-carolina-state-plan-on-aging-2013-2017-aarp.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/ambulance-services.html#1368>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.sctelehealth.org/Home/ForPatients>

- Medical education providing continuing education for health professionals and special medical education seminars for targeted groups in rural areas
- Store-and-forward transmitting recorded health history, diagnostic images, and/or video clips for later evaluation of a patient case
- Remote Patient Monitoring remotely collecting and transferring data from an individual for interpretation. Such data might include a specific vital sign, such as blood glucose or blood pressure, for homebound patients. Such services can be used to supplement the use of home health nurses.

## **Community Liveability Improvements Projects (CLIPs)**

### **6. Healthy homes**

Lead is a naturally occurring substance that can be toxic when ingested by people. At low levels of exposure, lead impacts the functioning of most organs and bodily systems, but particularly damages the nervous system. Children are most at risk of these damaging health effects, as their brains and nervous systems are developing. Lead exposure for children causes learning disabilities and behavioral problems (CDC, 2017). The most common primary exposure pathway for children is lead based paint (LBP). This paint can present a problem if the paint peels or cracks, where children can be exposed to it orally or by breathing in lead dust. LBP was banned in the United States in 1978, but still presents a danger to children living in homes constructed prior to 1978.

In 2014, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) published a study of children in South Carolina with elevated levels of lead in their blood<sup>15</sup>. They found that in comparing children with and without elevated blood lead levels (EBLL) higher percentages were found in areas with a median home age of 1976, in more rural settings, among non-Hispanic blacks, lower median incomes (\$36,442), and renters.

US Census statistics estimate nearly 75% of homes in Lamar are built before 1980, and that 20% of units are renter occupied (US Census, 2016). Given the age of the housing in Lamar and population statistics mirroring those of children who have EBLL, Lamar should consider a focus on lead awareness as part of any housing program conducted by the city. Lead is a primary concern during

housing renovations or in deteriorated homes where it can present a pathway for exposure. In a paper for the National Institute of Health, Korfmacher and Hanley (2014) identified that cities with local laws targeting housing had been successful in reducing childhood lead exposure. Through monitoring areas where blood tests showed children already with EBL and areas with pre-1978 housing, inspectors focused on buildings and areas that presented the greatest risk to children. Key take-aways for a small city from this report are that local ordinances can be adopted or changed to require annual inspections by property owners of rental properties, that lead-safe work practices be performed in pre-1978 housing, and that homes at greatest risk receive periodic inspections by health or building inspectors.

Removing LBP is the best way to reduce childhood lead exposure but lead remediation can be a costly undertaking. Public awareness campaigns can also serve to reduce exposure by ensuring property owners and tenants are aware of the hazards that may be in their home. Homes constructed prior to 1978 must provide a lead disclosure, and that information is available online through the Environmental Protection Agency website. An inspection program can ensure that such disclosures are being provided and understood by building owners and tenants.

Grant programs exist to remediate homes for lead hazards through the Department of Housing and Urban Development but have recently been targeted for budget cuts. Through inspection programs, enforcement, and public awareness campaigns, Lamar can reduce the risk of lead exposure for children living in pre-1978 homes. Links are provided to information resources for public awareness campaigns, the South Carolina Bureau of Maternal and Child Health who study and track childhood lead exposure, as well as CDC public awareness campaign materials.

## **Community Liveability Improvements Projects (CLIPs)**

### **G. Elderly Tax Abatement Program**

When looking at affordable housing options in small rural towns, the home ownership rates tend to be higher than those in larger cities. The largest issues that homeowners tend to face are being able to afford the upkeep and payments

associated with their homes. This is particularly true for elderly residents because of their fixed income and their access to jobs after retirement. To help keep homes affordable, Lamar residents could benefit from implementing an Elderly Resident Tax Abatement Program that would benefit their population of roughly 24.1% that is aged 65 or over.<sup>16</sup>

The Elderly Tax Abatement Program is a form (See Figure 38) of a work program where qualified residents that are 60 or older can work for the Town of Lamar in exchange for forgiveness of a portion of their property tax bill. Residents will work for minimum wage (\$7.25/hour) and can only receive up to a certain amount, as determined by the town. Counties, towns and other municipalities have capped the reduction at \$750 to \$1000 per fiscal year.

To target residents of specific incomes, Lamar could implement restrictions on qualifying income for the program to ensure residents who need more assistance are the ones utilizing the program. The program should stipulate that a person's tax bill cannot go below zero dollars and hours worked are only applicable for that fiscal year and cannot be rolled over.

For this program to be beneficial to the residents and the town, departments will determine what help they need, and the skills needed for this job. A pre-determined number of positions will be available each year based on departmental needs. Residents will fill out applications with their skills and interests and then matched with open positions. Programs have worked best for both the municipality and the resident when departments have been able to interview to determine if there will be a good fit.

A successful example of this program is already occurring in Dorchester County, South Carolina. The County follows the work method as applied above for each hour worked, \$7.25 is forgiven off of their property tax bill. Dorchester County allows for the property taxes to be forgiven specifically for the County Operating, County Debt and Capital Improvements<sup>17</sup>. If Lamar wanted, they could specifically address parts of the property taxes that these funds would come out

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<sup>16</sup> [U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Dorchester County Tax Abatement Application](#)

of. Other cities that have successfully implemented this program are Saco, Maine, Ayer, Massachusetts and New York, New York.

This property tax abatement program will help to reduce the burden of property tax bills for senior citizens while filling a possible labor void in the City's work force. Lamar should cap the amount of property taxes that they are willing to forgive so the annual budget and city services don't decline too much or put too much of a property tax burden on the rest of the residents.

Figure 38. Tax Abatement Program Application

TOWN OF LAMAR, SC

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## SENIOR CITIZENS TAX ABATEMENT PROGRAM APPLICATION

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APPLICANTS WORK AT THE CURRENT MINIMUM WAGE RATE (\$7.25) AS INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS FOR THE NUMBER OF HOURS AGREED UPON. PAYMENT WILL BE RECEIVED IN A REDUCTION OF THEIR PROPERTY TAX BILL. LAMAR WILL TRY TO PLACE TAX ABATEMENT APPLICANTS INTO POSITIONS THAT MATCH THEIR SKILLSET AND INTEREST.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS APPLICATION IS NOT A CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

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<b>APPLICANT NAME:</b>	<b>PHONE NUMBER</b>
<b>NAME ON TAX BILL</b>	<b>PARCEL/TAX NUMBER</b>
<b>DATE OF BIRTH</b>	<b>SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER</b>
<b>ADDRESS</b>	<b>EMERGENCY CONTACT</b>

---

**PREVIOUS APPLICANT?** ☐ YES ☐ NO

**FORMER OCCUPATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**HOBBIES/INTERESTS** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>SKILLS</b>	<b>WORK DAY AVAILABILITY</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> COMPUTER	<input type="checkbox"/> HALF DAY
<input type="checkbox"/> TYPING	<input type="checkbox"/> FULL DAY
<input type="checkbox"/> DATA ENTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> MONDAY
<input type="checkbox"/> FILING	<input type="checkbox"/> TUESDAY
<input type="checkbox"/> CLERICAL	<input type="checkbox"/> WEDNESDAY
<input type="checkbox"/> ACCOUNTING	<input type="checkbox"/> THURSDAY
<input type="checkbox"/> MAINTENENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> FRIDAY
<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER?	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER?

**PHYSICAL/HEALTH CONCERNS**

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Bureau of Maternal and Child Health

2600 Bull Street

Columbia, SC 29201

Phone: 803-898-3432

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Lead-Based Paint and Lead Hazard Reduction Demonstration Grant Programs

[https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/healthy\\_homes/lbp/lhc](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/healthy_homes/lbp/lhc)

Public Awareness campaign materials

*The Creative Community Builder's Handbook: How to Transform Communities Using Local Assets, Arts, and Culture*, written by Tom Borrup, Ph.D.

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## Appendix A