

# Community Revitalization Tools

## Preservation Development Initiative: Macon

### *The Program*

The Preservation Development Initiative (PDI) is a pilot project of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP). PDI provided technical assistance and financial support to eight targeted U.S. cities to help demonstrate the importance of including preservation as a core component of neighborhood revitalization. PDI is funded by the John L. and James S. Knight Foundation, with support from the Ford Foundation and is administered by the Strategic Services Division of the NTHP Community Revitalization Department.



In each program city, NTHP representatives first conducted a thorough assessment of local preservation challenges and opportunities. Staff compiled its results in an Assessment Report presented to the City, local partners and other entities. Strategic Services then worked closely with these stakeholders to shape a strategy that would leverage the community's physical, cultural and economic assets, and fully integrate preservation as an effective approach in rejuvenating older residential and commercial properties. Over a three-year period, PDI has invested more than \$1.1 million in direct assistance and preservation-related resources in the eight demonstration sites.

In Macon, Georgia, PDI focused strategies on the revitalization of neighborhood business districts, the downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods, in addition to identifying opportunities to grow cultural heritage tourism. PDI recommendations included downtown business recruitment, development and retention efforts; improved branding, marketing and promotion of the central business district, and the continued preservation and redevelopment of downtown historic commercial buildings. PDI also sponsored a design charrette to discuss developing multi-modal transportation corridors between historic neighborhoods and the downtown.

### *The City*

Macon is a city of 97,000 located in central Georgia, approximately 75 miles south of Atlanta. It enjoys a beautiful natural setting and significant historic assets, yet its downtown and close-in neighborhoods are still struggling to overcome a downward economic trend that beset Macon—like many other cities—in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Suburban growth, changes in the retailing industry, aging infrastructure and interstate highway construction all contributed to a decline in urban economic activity and neighborhood vitality.

Macon was uniquely positioned to benefit from PDI's expertise because historic preservation had already proven to be a successful revitalization tool by several local groups involved in historic real estate redevelopment. PDI's role was to assess how Macon's Steering Committee could prioritize activities to maximize the use of historic preservation as a community and economic development strategy.

Following the assessment, the Steering Committee, composed of representatives from three key groups—NewTown Macon, the Historic Macon Foundation and the InTown Macon Neighborhood Association—worked together to evaluate and implement the assessment recommendations. Other important stakeholders included the City of Macon, the Chamber of Commerce, a local Community Development Corporation and Mercer University.

**For more information about PDI, visit [www.PreservationNation.org](http://www.PreservationNation.org).**

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### *Preservation Accomplishments*

PDI technical and financial assistance supported a number of preservation-based activities in Macon. Completed projects included a grocery store feasibility study for downtown Macon, a community design charrette, architectural review of historic homes in the Beall's Hill neighborhood, and design and installation of historic neighborhood banners. PDI also contributed \$39,000 for architectural work in support of the rehabilitation of a former bus terminal. Four of the completed projects are highlighted below:

- PDI supported **architectural design work** on the estimated \$2.9 million rehabilitation of a former bus terminal into multipurpose office/public space for the Macon-Bibb County Convention and Visitors Bureau. This conversion creates a state-of-the-art visitor information center, training and resource center and marketing offices for the Bureau. The terminal's location on a major traffic artery and proximity to key downtown attractions was ideal both for the Bureau's needs and for the continuing revitalization of an important downtown corridor. The Historic Macon Foundation presented its 2007 Preservation Award in Adaptive Reuse to the Convention and Visitors Bureau for this rehabilitation.
- PDI consultants organized a **Community Design Charrette** to discuss how to improve the "walkability" of downtown and enhance pedestrian connectivity between downtown and nearby residential neighborhoods. Concepts for improving the streetscapes of four downtown streets were presented by teams of local and PDI professionals. Mercer University students contributed a plan to create a creative corridor that made restaurants, retail and other amenities walkable for college students, neighborhood residents and visitors alike. This plan was refined and later resulted in the Mayor of Macon forming a College Hill Corridor Commission to implement the students' plan. This involves a branding campaign, beautification projects and identifying new retail opportunities.
- The National Trust Loan Fund (NTLF) provided **pre-development and construction financing** for the rehabilitation of the historic Telephone Exchange Building in downtown Macon. With a total project cost of \$1,283,000 NTLF provided of loan of \$500,000, of which approximately \$85,000 is PDI funds.
- An **architecture and engineering review** of ten houses in the Beall's Hill neighborhood was also completed with PDI financial assistance. This enabled the Historic Macon Foundation (HMF) to take title to and rehabilitate several homes for resale. HMF was recently awarded a \$700,000 grant from the Knight Foundation to continue its work in this neighborhood by rehabilitating another 9 properties over the next 2 years.

### *Impact*

In addition to these successes, other key PDI achievements will have a lasting impact on the community development landscape in Macon. These include establishing collaboration between NewTown Macon, HMF, and InTown Macon Neighborhood Association; elevating the profile of preservation-based revitalization in Macon; attracting bank financing, and bolstering NewTown's capacity and model for purchasing and rehabilitating properties. Perhaps most importantly, stakeholders in Macon are in strong agreement that historic preservation is a key component to bringing middle-class homeowners back into the city, thus fueling economic development and neighborhood revitalization.