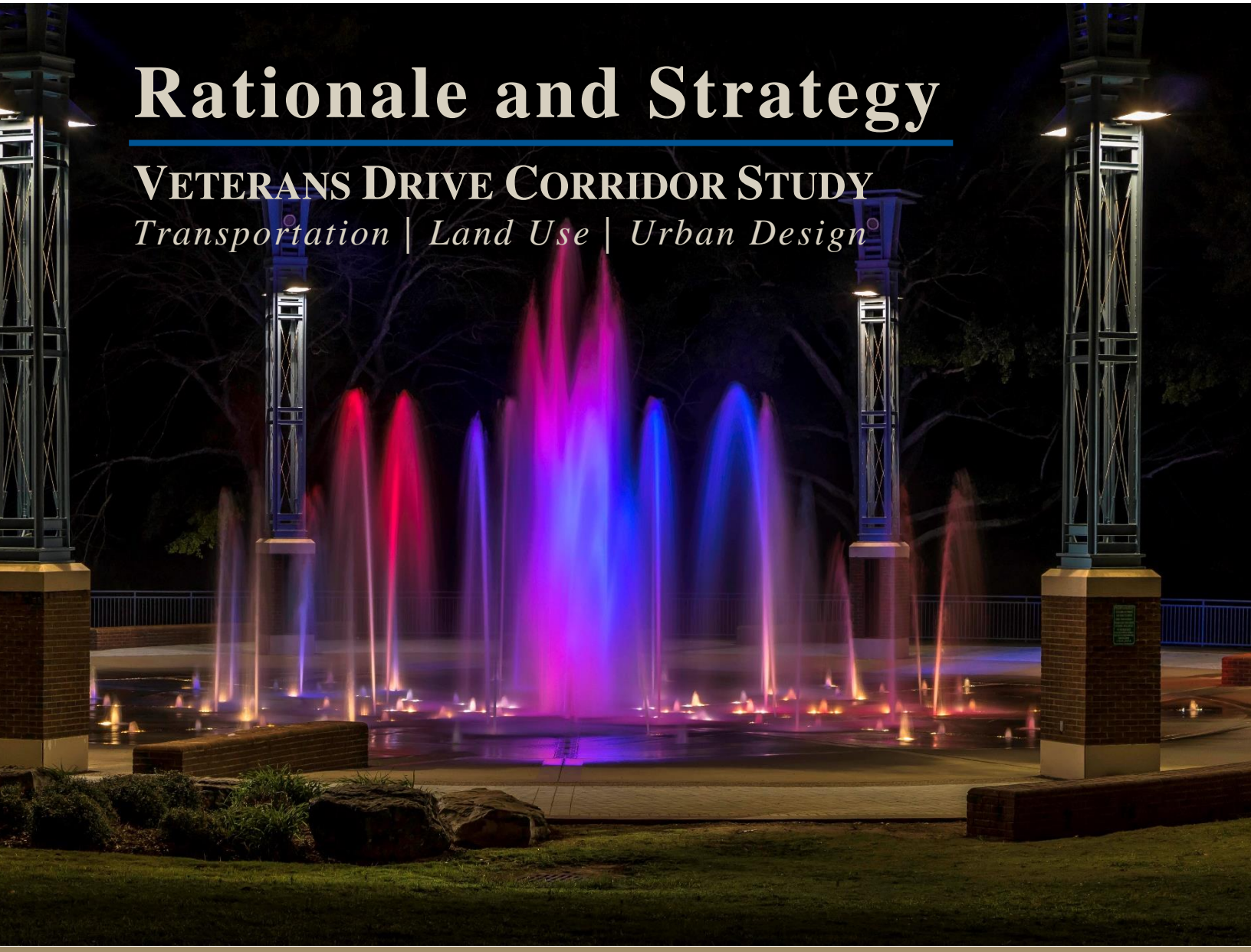
Rationale and Strategy

VETERANS DRIVE CORRIDOR STUDY

Transportation | Land Use | Urban Design



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September 21, 2021

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Mission | Vision | Values

Mission

It is our mission and responsibility to create orderly, thriving physical, social, and economic conditions.

Vision

To be an unbiased partner to citizens and stakeholders through policy recommendations, thorough planning, and management of developed plans and projects.

Values

We will uphold the high standards for the quality of life established by citizens.

We will collect and incorporate sound scientific information and local knowledge.

We will engage citizens in the planning process.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning provides for a systematic approach to thinking about an overall vision for the future, setting long-range goals for the physical character of the community, and devising policies, programs, and projects to move the community toward fulfillment of those goals. A strategic plan is intended to evolve and grow in response to changes in public values and to market and physical conditions. Only through continuous use, evaluation, detailing, reconsideration and amendment can the plan fully serve its stakeholders, and only then can they use it fully and creatively as they seek achievement of their vision for the community. Thus, a *strategic plan should not propose or provide "quick fix" solutions*, nor should it be viewed simply as a change platform. Rather, strategic planning is *intended to strengthen, revitalize and optimize* one or more aspects over the long term.

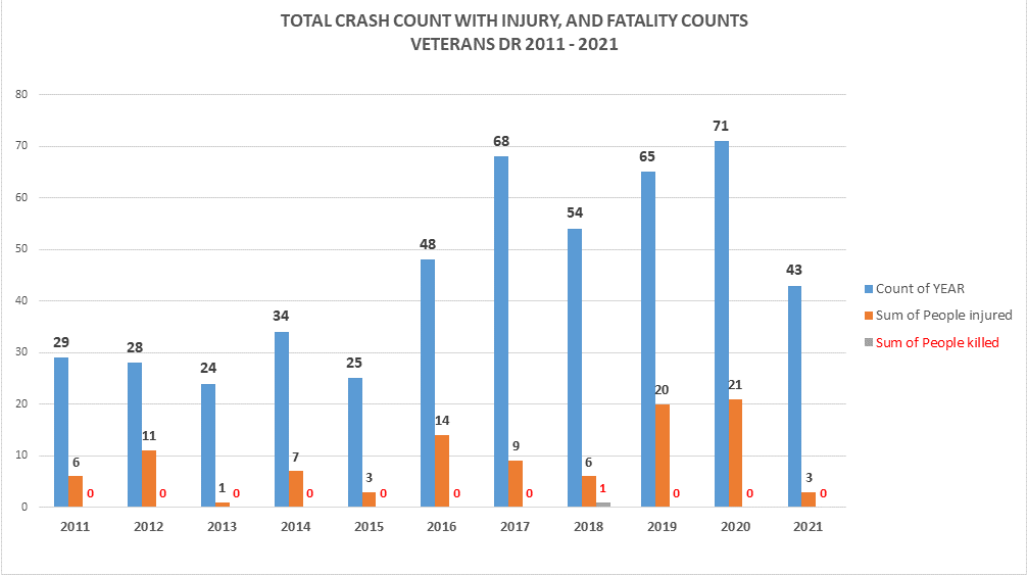
A community's neighborhoods, institutions, schools, parks and commercial and industrial centers are not developed or redeveloped overnight, but rather as a result of a *decision making process*. Additionally, such change in a community occurs in a continuous manner and is inevitable. Therefore, the *decision making process* is *not if* growth will occur, but rather *how* it will occur: compact and orderly or sprawled and uncoordinated. The purpose of *municipal planning* is to provide the means to *manage* change in the developed, undeveloped, and redeveloped environment so that communities *get what they want rather than take what they get.*

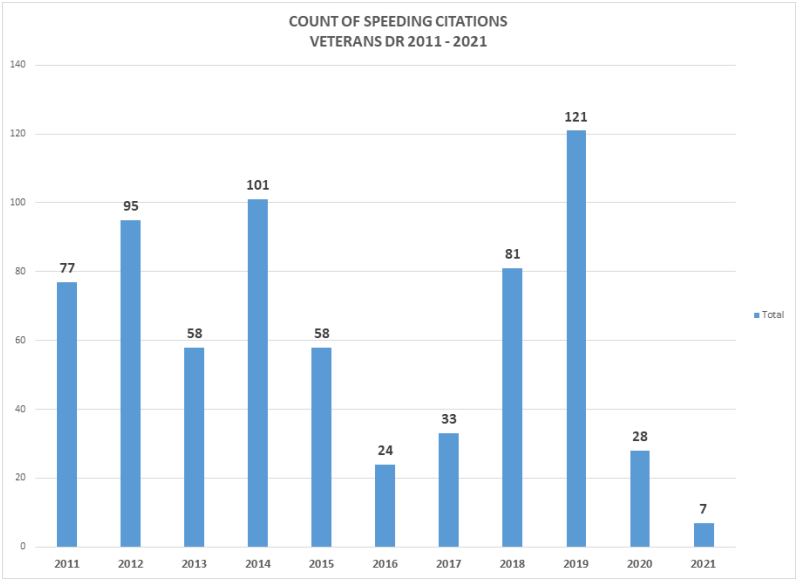
Study Rationale

The Veterans Drive Corridor has experienced significant changes in several areas and occupies a unique position in the City. In 2002, the Patton Island Bridge – later dedicated as Singing River Bridge - opened, forming a new Tennessee River crossing approximately 1 mile west of Wilson Dam. The bridge was the first project completed as part of the Patton Island Corridor. As a result, State Route 133 was shifted to this new six-lane super-structure. For more than six years, after crossing the bridge into Florence, the route turned east onto Veterans Drive for 1.6 miles to join Cox Creek Parkway just north of Wilson Dam. The final extension of the project, from Huntsville Road to Helton Drive, opened on

October 16, 2008. This included the opening of an overpass and interchange at the intersection with Florence Boulevard. (US 43/US 72/SR 13). The highway is six lanes from the bridge north to the connection with Helton Drive at its intersection with Hermitage Drive. However, the routing of State Route 133 on this new portion is unclear as highway signage and mobile mapping application continue to navigate State Route 133 to Veterans Drive.

The mix of vehicular traffic volumes, anticipated future high pedestrian volumes, excessive speed in the Veterans Drive Corridor is a problem. Since 2015, motor vehicle accidents have significantly increased including a fatality in 2018. Four pedestrians have been struck by a motor vehicle in the same time period. Speeding, including reckless driving, remains an issue as well. The drop in speeding citations in 2016-2017 is attributed to the Alabama Department of Transportation project # NH-STPAA-0133(508) involving the resurfacing of State Route 133 from the Helton Drive overpass to Cox Creek Parkway.





Coupled with the importance of this route as a gateway and key connection to the North Alabama Medical Center, the problem also is focused on visibility, aesthetics, connectivity, and neighborhood vitality. Stakeholders will be consulted to define a set of goals and objectives fleshing out the project's overall purpose to implement a plan to create a more inviting and safe Veterans Drive. The roadway corridor and surrounding neighborhood setting requires the examination of *diverse yet interrelated issues* such as:

- *Major Changes in Land Use*
  - Proposed development along Veterans Drive
  - Future hospital expansions
  - Potential housing developments
  - Veterans frontage
  - Harmony/cohesiveness to Sweetwater District
- *Transportation*
  - Through traffic – S. Cox Creek Parkway (AL 133) and Helton Drive (AL 157)
  - Local traffic – Street/driveway connections, deliveries, and other traffic generators
  - Bicycle and pedestrian generators, potentials, routes, requirements, volumes
  - Pedestrian generators, volumes, routes
  - Connections to the River Heritage trail
- *Urban Design*
  - Corridor visual quality – overhead utilities, signage, pedestrian focus, street trees
  - Gateway to the city
  - Block structure, alley system, parking
- *Mixed use development focus*
  - Architectural control
  - Historic preservation/conservation

Best Practices Planning Approach

The *Veterans Drive Corridor Study* will inform the decision making process by providing community stakeholders with the tools to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, develop alternatives to solve problems, and determine a recommended strategy for the future development and redevelopment of the corridor

1. Inventory Conditions and Identify Issues

A data *inventory of historical and current conditions* will be developed for analysis to confirm and clarify the problems and issues and identify goals and needs. Internal and External Stakeholders will inform the process of identifying problems, issues, goals, and needs.

2. Analyze the Data

Data analyses allows for *identification of significant trends and relationships* between problems and potentials. Such analysis will include transportation, existing land use vs. the City's Comprehensive Plan, and the like to understand existing conditions, cause for conditions, trends, location and scope of problems, issues, goals, or needs.

3. Develop and Evaluate Alternatives

This step involves *identifying possible alternative solutions* that can potentially address problems, issues, goals and needs including providing benefits and costs for each alternative as well as evaluation criteria.

4. Plan Recommendation

Plan recommendation includes *selecting an alternative and recommending a strategy* that identifies specific policies, programs and projects to address the problems, issues, goals, or needs *including acceptable levels of service, desired development characteristics, funding alternatives, and proposed timetable detailing actions needed*. Following the approval of the recommendation by the City project management team, a formal presentation will be made to the City Council and the Planning Commission for adoption.

5. Plan Implementation

Plan implementation *takes time and goodwill*. Planners must strive to get stakeholders interested and involved in setting and implementing the plan's vision. Continuing to *gather other agencies, public and private, onto the same team* is imperative. The city must continue to prioritize and take direct action on plan recommendation by allocating funding to further its goals. Further, city officials, elected officials, and appointed officials (e.g. planning commission and board of zoning adjustment) must help shape the actions of others with not just more regulation, but more effective regulation. The city must be willing to *encourage others to take the lead* in activities that further implementation of the plan's policies. And finally, the city must strive to make public investment *decisions in concert with the plan.*

Stakeholder Engagement

The *focal point* of the strategic planning process is dialog amongst and between the *internal and external stakeholders* – the people and organizations which are affected by the decisions and work of the city. Stakeholder roles vary as well as their length of engagement. The recommended stakeholders and communication strategy includes:

Internal Stakeholders

Mayor

Rationale:	Relationship-building; communicate concerns and desires
Desired Outcome:	Full support of policies, programs and projects
Communication:	Face-to-face meetings
Time Frame:	Involved throughout plan development and implementation.
Details:	Responsible for authorizing and tasking involvement of mayoral appointed employees and commissions; Assists in communication with external stakeholders especially citizens. Planning Director is responsible for communicating to Mayor.

City Council

Rationale:	Relationship-building; communicate concerns and desires
Desired Outcome:	Full support of policies, programs and projects
Communication:	Face-to-face meetings; group charrettes
Time Frame:	Involved throughout plan development and implementation.
Details:	Responsible for authorizing and tasking involvement of council appointed employees; Assists in communication with external stakeholders especially citizens. Planning Director is responsible for communicating to City Council.

Inter-Departmental Employees

Rationale:	Identification of strengths and weaknesses; resources and assets
Desired Outcome:	Full support during planning process; understanding for implementation
Communication:	Face-to-face meetings, surveying, group charrettes
Time Frame:	Involved throughout plan development and implementation.
Details:	Assists with data collection, public engagement, and communication with internal and external stakeholders. Planning Director is responsible for communicating to Inter-Departmental Employees.

Planning Commission

Rationale:	Relationship-building; communicate concerns and desires
Desired Outcome:	Full support of policies, programs and projects
Communication:	Group charrettes; monthly meetings
Time Frame:	Involved throughout plan development and implementation.
Details:	Mayor is responsible for tasking; Director is responsible for communicating to Planning Commission.

External Stakeholders

Citizens

Rationale:	Relationship-building; communicate concerns and desires; perspective
Desired Outcome:	Understand and support of policies, programs and projects
Communication:	Direct, surveying, social media, focus groups, town hall meetings
Time Frame:	Consulted, updated throughout plan development and implementation.
Details:	Planning Director, with assistance from internal stakeholders, is responsible for ensuring and executing proper engagement and communication.

Business Owners

Rationale:	Relationship-building; communicate concerns and desires; perspective
Desired Outcome:	Understand and support of policies, programs and projects
Communication:	Surveying, social media, focus groups
Time Frame:	Updated throughout the entire process
Details:	Planning Director, with assistance from internal stakeholders, is responsible for ensuring and executing proper engagement and communication.

Community Leaders

Rationale: Relationship-building; communicate concerns and desires; perspective
Desired Outcome: Understand and support of policies, programs and projects
Communication: Surveying, social media, focus groups
Time Frame: Updated throughout the entire process
Details: Planning Director, with assistance from internal stakeholders, is responsible for ensuring and executing proper engagement and communication.

Scheduling

Proposed Work Plan

	Item	Stakeholder Group	Due
1	Work Period 1: Inventory and Analysis; identify review group	Internal	9/22/2021 – 12/17/2021
2	Project Initiation Meeting	Both – specialized	10/20/2021
3	Review Period 1	Review Group	1/6/2022
4	ALDOT Review 1	Review Group	TBD
5	Public Engagement 1A: Stakeholder Interviews	Both – specialized	1/5/2022, 1/6/2022
6	Public Engagement 1B: Stakeholder Meeting	External - Neighborhood	1/11/2022
7	Public Engagement 1C: Online Surveying	External - All	1/11/2022 – 1/25/2022
8	Review Period 2	Internal	2/3/2022
9	Work Period 2: Preliminary Concept Development	Internal	2/7/2022 – 4/1/2022
10	Review Period 3A	Internal	3/3/2022
11	Review Period 3B	Internal	4/7/2022
12	ALDOT Review 2	Review Group	TBD
13	Public Engagement 2: Preliminary Concept Presentation	External	4/12/2022
14	Public Comment Period: Preliminary Concept	External	4/13/2022 – 4/22/2022
15	Review Period 4	Internal	5/5/2022
16	Work Period 3: Final Plan Development	Internal	5/9/2022 – 5/31/2022
17	Review Period 5	Internal	6/2/2022
18	City Council and Planning Commission Presentation	All	6/21/2022, 6/28/2022

Proposed Engagement Plan

	Item	Stakeholder Group	Due
1	Project Announcement Press Release	Internal	9/22/2021
2	Work Period 1: Prep Initial Public Engagement Materials	Internal	9/22/2021 – 10/29/2021
3	Review Period 1: Review Engagement Materials	Internal	11/4/2021
4	Public Engagement 1A: Stakeholder Interviews	Both – specialized	1/5/2022, 1/6/2022
5	Public Engagement 1B: Stakeholder Meeting	External - Neighborhood	1/11/2022
6	Public Engagement 1C: Online Surveying	External - All	1/11/2022 – 1/25/2022
7	Review Period 2: Review External Stakeholder Input	Internal	2/3/2022
8	Launch Website (Press Release)	Internal	2/7/2022
9	Review Period 3: Announce Preliminary Concept Presentation	Internal	3/14/2022
10	Public Engagement 2: Preliminary Concept Presentation	External	4/12/2022
11	Public Comment Period: Preliminary Concept + Update website	External	4/13/2022 – 4/22/2022
12	Review Period 4: Review Public Comment	Internal	5/5/2022
13	Update website + Announce CC and PC Presentations	Internal	5/6/2022
14	City Council and Planning Commission Presentation	All	6/21/2022, 6/28/2022