

DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE NEWS

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Tax Incentives Could Spur Downtown Development

By Carol Hunter

Alabama's economic development officials have long used financial incentives to attract industrial investment in the state, Thyssen Krupp being one of the largest and most recent examples. The projects are designed to pay off in terms of jobs (both construction and permanent employment) and eventual increases in the tax base that funds basic government services. The tools are important, many would argue critical, to the Alabama's ability to compete with other states when it comes to landing the Mercedes-Benz and Hyundais of the world.

The state legislature is now considering a package of bills that would leverage investment in the urban cores of our larger cities through the use of similar incentives. The Downtown Mobile Alliance, in partnership with representatives from Birmingham and Montgomery, has worked to help draft three bills that have been used to great advantage in neighboring states. The bills would authorize Historic Tax Credits, New Markets Tax Credits and the creation of Cultural Districts.

Several of Downtown Mobile's most significant historic buildings, such as the Van Antwerp, could see new life sooner rather than later if state tax credits become available.



State level **Historic Tax Credits** mirror the federal historic tax credit program and would offer a tax break for developers who renovate historic properties. Many qualifying properties are in desperate need of restoration, and because of regulations governing the rehabilitation of such buildings, the cost of doing so can be prohibitive. According to research by Dr. Russ Hardin, Professor of Accounting at the University of South Alabama, "Historic preservation tax credits enable developers and homeowners to leverage their investments in historical residential, rental and commercial properties. Historic preservation provides more benefits than just 'fixing' deteriorating buildings." His findings indicate historic preservation:

- Creates sought-after residential and commercial properties in in-town locations
- Maximizes the use of existing infrastructure such as water and sewage treatment facilities, water and sewage lines, and existing roads
- Creates jobs, promotes commerce and tourism, enhances property values, and expands the tax base
- Creates temporary construction jobs and increases sales of construction related products
- Utilizes existing infrastructure and saves state and local government tax dollars that they would have to spend on new development projects

The state level **New Markets Tax Credits** also mirror the federal program and provide investors with a tax credit for investing in communities that are economically distressed or consist of low-income populations. New Markets Tax Credits help accomplish three objectives: (1) bring additional funding into low-income communities, (2) bridge funding gaps in projects, and (3) provide strong returns on investment to those willing to risk their capital. The federal government benefits through job creation at a lower cost. A state benefits from job creation, downtown revitalization and blight removal, an increase in wage earning taxpayers, an expanded property tax base from property improvements, more efficient use of existing infrastructure, a reduction of urban sprawl, and improvement of living/working conditions in previously distressed communities.

Since many of Alabama's neighboring states offer such state tax credits, we are at a distinct competitive disadvantage when it comes to attracting projects to our downtowns. Consider the two states with which we compete frequently, Mississippi and Louisiana. In the six years between 2003

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A Changing Retail Landscape

This will sound really crazy, but these days I look forward every month to receiving a magazine called "Shopping Centers Today." It is the trade magazine for the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC). Now obviously this group is first and foremost, one that is focused on what some consider the archenemy of downtowns – the suburban shopping center. Fair enough, but a funny thing has been happening over the past few years. The leadership of ICSC has been cozying up to the leadership of the International Downtown Association. I know this is hard to believe, but these ICSC folks are quite nice. More importantly however, they are slipping some of our urban culture into their culture.

I guess this is not such a reach. In every other country throughout this vast world of ours, most shopping centers are urban. They are densely constructed and placed in the central areas of their cities. It is only in America where the landmass was vast and fuel was cheap that during the last century our shopping centers flattened out and drifted ever further outward from the central cities.

What is interesting to read in article after article in the ICSC magazine is reference after reference to a slow drift back to density and central cities, as well as changes in retailing that track with initiatives being pursued in Downtown Mobile. Perhaps this is driven by demographics as many suggest. Perhaps this is driven by rising energy costs as others suggest. Perhaps this is driven by the new reality of the post Great Recession economy as still others suggest. I do not know. It is probably all of that and more, but does it really matter for our purposes? I think not.

The March 2012 publication held several articles that were most interesting. The first involved recent research about youth shopping preferences. Researchers at the Laboratory Institute of Merchandising College in NYC found that 18-25-year-olds prefer to buy clothes & footwear (the majority of what this age group purchases) in stores. The study found that this age group researches its purchases online, but prefers to shop in a store. "The demise of the brick-and-mortar format of retailing – at least for 18-25 year-olds – is grossly exaggerated," the study's researchers stated. What will this mean for downtown-type, independent merchants? Hard to predict, but I have to think that Downtown Mobile's merchants can capture this group for its retail expenditures much like it currently captures this group for its entertainment purchases. Anecdotally, places like Inside Up have done quite well with this age group. They do a great job with their marketing on social media and offer a shopping environment that is attractive and fun for this age group.

Another article that was intriguing detailed the new promotion from Target wherein all 1600 stores will feature a showcase from a collection of specialty shops. Five shops – The Candy Store in San Francisco; The Cos Bar, a cosmetics shop in Aspen; Polka Dog Bakery from Boston; The Privet House, a vintage-furniture and home-accessories shop in Connecticut; and the Webster House, a designer clothing shop in Miami – will be featured in a mini-shop in Target stores for six weeks starting May 6. After that, another set of boutique retailers will be featured. Can you believe this? I think it is stunning.

It was not that long ago that the independent retailer was declared to be going the way of the dinosaurs. Now, one of the giants of the world's retailing community is bringing mini-retailers into their stores. Interestingly, this collection of boutique retailers sounds much like the retailers getting their start in the Urban Emporium. In that environment, the retailers can take advantage of the draw of the other tenants to strengthen their sales. Only on the rarest of occasions, is a sale rung up in Urban Emporium that involves only one tenant. Most often shoppers select goods from multiple merchants to fulfill their needs. I would assume that Target expects to benefit from this arrangement. I have no doubt that the boutique retailers will benefit from the arrangement.

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First Phase of Artist Housing Study Complete

By Fred Rendfrey

There is a cycle regarding the redevelopment of urban neighborhoods over the last century in the United States. Artists serve as pioneers by congregating in edgier, transitional neighborhoods, often helping transform these neighborhoods into funky and inspiring communities in which to live. Then, when the neighborhoods become trendy and popular, the artists are frequently forced out of their newly gentrified neighborhoods by the increased cost of living from the authentic neighborhood they helped to create. Artists are not only great neighbors who often are active community members, but each artist is an entrepreneur, the owner and operator of his or her own cottage industry.

Artspace is a national, non-profit real estate development and consulting firm whose mission is to create, foster, and preserve affordable space for artists and arts organizations. Artspace uses varied sources of government and civic funding, as well as 33 years of experience in the multi-family housing business, to build and manage living and studio space for artists.

Artspace was brought to Downtown Mobile by a consortium of groups, including the Downtown Mobile Alliance, the City of Mobile's Neighborhood and Community Services Department, Restore Mobile, the Mobile Historic Development Commission, the Sybil H Smith Charitable Trust, the J.L. Bedsole Foundation and the Michael C. and Patsy B. Dow Charitable Fund, to perform a pre-feasibility analysis on whether Mobile could sustain a development dedicated in perpetuity to artists for live/work space. The goal was not to prevent artists from being forced out of downtown, but rather to use a development geared towards artists to serve as a catalyst for further downtown redevelopment.

Artspace's representatives were in Downtown Mobile November 7-9 visiting with stakeholders to determine the need for such a project from the artists' perspective. The stakeholders included artists, arts organizations, city and county representatives, civic groups and charitable organizations. Artists were polled about the need for an artist live/work development, the percentage of their income received from art and the expenses of living in the Mobile region.

Artspace also had the opportunity to tour five buildings in Downtown Mobile to perform a site analysis of what organizers thought would be the best



The Seaman's Bethel (most recently City Hall North) at the intersection of St. Joseph and Water streets is one of several possibilities for an Artspace project.

buildings for redevelopment: the Van Antwerp building, the Gayfer's building, the former Press-Register building at 304 Government Street, the former Seaman's Bethel and the Red Cross site at Dauphin and Broad Streets. From an artist housing perspective there were features unique to each site, but Artspace representatives caution against "falling in love with a site" because there are so many things that can disrupt the process in the early stages. Rather, they looked for the salient physical amenities necessary for artist housing which were high ceilings, open floor plans and access to natural light.

The interest and excitement about a potential artist housing development was evident during the few days that Artspace spent in Downtown Mobile, so much so, in fact, that Artspace believes the Port City can support between 40 and 60 units of artist live/work space. Unfortunately, anecdotal stories do not renovate buildings, so the next step is to raise funds necessary to perform an extensive market analysis which will tell Artspace the exact number of units to construct and the rents that the artists can afford. The full Artspace report is available on our website www.downtownmobile.org. If you are interested in donating funds to Main Street Mobile to help fund the artist market analysis call (251) 434-8498.

Downtown Marketing 2.0

By Valerie Kleinschmidt

The downtown community is now at your fingertips, thanks to a new online directory for Downtown Mobile! The Downtown Mobile Alliance (DMA) partnered with Local Thunder, a national internet marketing firm, to create this original interface for merchants and professionals to better reach their customers. The team from Local Thunder came in town for a week in January to meet with local businesses and share the many benefits of showcasing their establishment on the directory. The launch of the directory was celebrated at the Royal Scam on January 17th and also

served as an opportunity to educate attendees on how to utilize the tools of the directory for reaching marketing goals.

In this day and age, with technology changing so quickly, using the internet in innovative and effective ways is essential for commercial growth. Local Thunder works one-on-one with each business owner to operate the directory's internet and mobile tools. By syncing with social media, customers are reached on mobile devices and dialogue is spurred among loyal followers. To drive more customers downtown, special offers can be

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Alliance Welcomes New Horticulturist

Few initiatives have been as transformative as the creation of flower beds along our major pedestrian corridors and the gateways to downtown. The folks who live, work and play in our city center have come to expect amazing color, texture and form with each new planting, and we'll be able to continue to deliver the "wow" factor with the help of our new horticulturist, Hap Kern, BLA. Hap is a landscape architect with a degree in Graphic Design as well as a masters in Landscape Architecture. His design talents are already evident in the 200 flowers beds maintained by the Alliance throughout downtown.

Hap says he's looking forward to continuing the beautification plans developed by our previous horticulturist Leslie Doyle, and even taking them "to the next level." He's been impressed by the impact the plantings have on everyone who spends time downtown, whether they're locals or visitors. "The compliments from passersby are just amazing," he says. "It's gratifying to know how much people appreciate the work we do."

Hap finds that the biggest challenges are trying to keep the squirrels out of the beds (the soft earth is a favorite spot to bury acorns) and trying to keep careless people from trampling the flowers. He's not sure which is worse, but, he concedes, both are a part of the urban gardening environment and are just another element to be factored in as he plans for the next spectacular blooming display.



Hap Kern up to his elbows in the Alliance's continuing beautification projects.

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and 2009, Alabama had only 11 projects totaling \$71 million that used federal new markets tax credits. In contrast, Mississippi and Louisiana, both of which have enacted state-level New Markets credits had 60 projects totaling \$276 million and 168 projects totaling \$333 million respectively.

Cultural Districts have been used with impressive results in New Orleans, a city taking a very proactive approach to attract creative entrepreneurs. The program is designed to spur development in neighborhoods experiencing high levels of vacant and neglected property. In such districts original works of art created and sold in the district are exempt from sales tax. The 20 Cultural Districts in the Crescent City have resulted in the revitalization of entire neighborhoods and have served as catalysts to improve areas surrounding the actual districts. "Culture creates jobs," said New Orleans cultural economy director, Scott Hutcheson. "When you give incentives for people to create and sell art, the culture becomes richer and people start to take notice."

The most competitive states across the country are looking for innovative ways to attract investment and spur development. The successful ones will be well positioned to capitalize on opportunities and draw 21st century entrepreneurs. Alabama needs to be among them if we are to prosper in the coming decades. It doesn't take an economist to see as our buildings languish, so does our tax base.

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posted, such as coupons, sales, contests, and electronic gift certificates. Additionally, the directory allows merchants to keep their internet presence fresh by telling their story in descriptions, menus, events, pictures and video. Understanding the customer base and how to find more patrons is an important aspect of the Alliance's effort to nurture and cultivate Downtown Mobile.

Anton Kaufer, Local Thunder Development Manager stated, "The level of engagement we've received from downtown businesses has been tremendous! Merchants such as restaurateurs, retailers, galleries, etc. have been enthusiastic about consumers finding them online and the Alliance web site. Professionals such as attorneys and Realtors have been excited about our communication tools and the ability to grow visibility in search engines."

Be sure to check out the directory regularly for specials, coupons, events and other exciting items being offered on the directory! Not only does this tool provide great advantages to business owners, but to locals and visitors alike. The directory even has GPS capabilities to easily find your destination. Help to spread the word about the directory to bring more people downtown to live, work, and play!

Scan this code for a link to the directory.



DOWNTOWN HOTLINE 251.327.SAFE (7233)

Hospitality Zone Assessment Process Continues

By Carol Hunter

After months of meetings, field observations and analysis involving input from dozens of stakeholders, the Downtown Mobile Alliances' Hospitality Zone Assessment is nearing completion. The recommendations resulting from the assessment are designed to help develop and manage the city's nighttime economy. The goals of the process include highlighting the community's resources and assets, identifying development opportunities, and defining practical solutions to the risks associated with hospitality zones and specifically, evening and late-night activity.

The Alliance hired the Responsible Hospitality Institute (RHI), a non-profit consulting firm specializing in improving entertainment districts, after several incidents of late night violence caused city leaders to consider ordinances limiting the age of patrons and hours of operation. According to Jim Peters with RHI, "Anticipating people's need for social interaction at different times of the day, and particularly at night, is critical for the success of a mixed-use community. Properly planned and managed, hospitality zones where people gather to enjoy food, drink, music and dancing can be a profitable investment, centralizing attractions and services." The reverse is certainly true: unplanned zones can lead to conflicts and place an excessive burden on public safety departments.

The assessment process began back in November with the convening of more than 60 stakeholders for roundtable discussions in six categories: public safety, quality of life, venue safety, multi-use sidewalks, entertainment and transportation. Each roundtable member was then asked to conduct a late night tour of Downtown Mobile with a checklist in hand. Participants were asked to consider such things as police presence, availability of taxis, diversity of music choices and general level of activity.

In January, the roundtable groups were brought back together to discuss their findings and develop an action plan that would help Mobile develop into a true "Sociable City," i.e., a city that harnesses its nightlife and sociability as an economic engine. Three major areas of focus were explored in each roundtable: vibrancy, safety and development.

While final recommendations will be made in the coming weeks, below are a few of the major themes that emerged from the process.

- Develop activities that will create vibrancy in the early evening hours
- Consider creating a monthly MusicWalk, similar to ArtWalk
- Streamline process for the creation of sidewalk cafes.
- Develop opportunities to increase public safety presence at night
- Improve management of trash
- Create a plan to encourage and expedite taxi use
- Identify primary pedestrian corridors to prioritize lighting improvements

While Downtown Mobile continues to be one of the safest, liveliest destinations in the area, improvements are necessary to adapt to changing demographics and customer expectations. It would be a mistake to think that our nightlife will continue to thrive if we don't make adjustments that will improve the customer experience, venue viability and the overall environment of downtown. The Hospitality Zone Assessment has provided a framework for developing a plan that will help our entertainment district mature into a sustainable economic engine that attracts people at all stages of life and economic levels.

Any process as extensive as this requires a considerable financial commitment, and we would like to acknowledge the following companies who provided much of the funding for the process:



Downtown Mobile Alliance Membership Grows

By Sherri Bumpers

Festive. Family-friendly. Unique. These are just a few words that have been used by visitors and locals to describe their experience in Downtown Mobile. Whether referring to the Ceiling of Lights that hang over Dauphin Street, Easter in the Squares, or Pole Vault on Dauphin, the Downtown Mobile Alliance takes pride in providing an experience that is memorable and enjoyable, an atmosphere that is attractive, and creating opportunities that are beneficial to our thriving businesses. "The Alliance makes Mobile look good, they literally clean up the area and put a face on Downtown Mobile," says Alliance member Richard Stimpson in an enthusiastic tone. It is through the support of the Downtown Mobile Alliance's members that we are able to receive these praises and accomplish such tasks.

The Downtown Mobile Alliance is a membership based organization formed to create and sustain exposure for the downtown community. With the financial support of our members, we market downtown as a premier destination

for unique eateries and retailers, a place to enjoy fine arts and entertainment, and for colleagues to do business. Increasing, influencing and promoting opportunities for visitors to frequent the area, creates ideal circumstances for patrons to become exposed to downtown services and visit our venues.

"A healthy downtown is critical to the success of any city, from that standpoint we're committed to a healthy and vibrant downtown, which is the very reason we support the Alliance as a member," says Christopher Gill, attorney at Hand Arendall, LLC. Being an Alliance member represents your support for economic development and allows you to play a significant role in the prosperity of your community. As a member, you are able to join our committees, giving you a voice and the ability to implement change in inefficient and obsolete policies.

"The number one reason I decided to join the Alliance is because of downtown
"Membership" continued on page 7

Retail Incubator Experiences Early Success

by Carol Hunter

If you're old enough to remember seeing the first images of Neil Armstrong walking on the moon, you probably remember shopping downtown. It doesn't matter where you lived at the time, city centers across the country were still home to major department stores and many independent retailers. Fast forward a single decade, and the rise of the shopping mall and suburban shopping centers all but wiped out downtown retail. There were intrepid hold-outs to be sure, and in fact, many Downtown Mobile merchants survived by adjusting goods to the shifting demographics. And now, it seems, they were right all along.

The newest trend in retail developments is the lifestyle center, the best examples of which combine residential as well as retail opportunities and, instead of 30-40 acres of vast parking lots, restrict cars to parking decks well hidden from sight. Developers are spending millions of dollars trying to recreate the pedestrian friendly infrastructure that already exists in downtowns across the country. A second game-changing trend is the emergence of the "experience economy," defined by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore as a retail environment focused on providing customers with memorable events, not just goods and services. For the most part, independent retailers have been at the forefront of this movement.

And yet, expanding the retail options in Downtown Mobile has been one of the most elusive goals the Downtown Mobile Alliance has ever tackled...until now. The opening of our retail incubator, the Urban Emporium, has attracted new merchants to downtown and helped enhance our neighborhood as a shopping destination. The Emporium is designed to encourage new or expanding retailers to give downtown a try. It offers staffing, a single point-of-sale system and training with an experienced retail consultant.

The Urban Emporium was an instant success as soon as it opened in October, confirming what many suspected was a true demand for more retail options downtown. One of the Emporium's most successful tenants almost immediately needed a larger space and has since moved into a formerly



empty storefront on Conception Street. This, after all, is the ultimate goal of the incubator...to nurture new retail to the point where they can succeed on their own, filling empty buildings and bringing new life to entire blocks.

One of the first tenants in the Urban Emporium was the Bellingrath Gardens and Home gift shop. Loretta Potapenko, the buyer for Bellingrath, has been in retailing for more than 20 years and has seen the "experience" trend emerge. "Downtown has a certain charm. There's just something about the feel of it that is interesting and fun," she says. A big part of that charm is the customer service that comes with independent retailers. When was the last time a clerk at a big box store offered to wrap your purchase, or deliver it to your office if you didn't have time to wait? This level of service is standard at many downtown shops, from the trendy clothing and home accents at Inside Up to the eclectic vintage and antique offerings at Papillion, and now at the Urban Emporium.

The Urban Emporium currently has eight tenants, but has room for two or three more, depending on how much space is needed. If you are interested in learning more about the Emporium, contact Fred Rendfrey at fred@downtownmobile.org or 251-434-8498. By joining this successful retail incubator, you may not only launch a new career, you'll be playing a pivotal role in the revitalization of Downtown Mobile.

Blighted Property

by Fred Rendfrey

We all recognize blighted conditions when we see them even though they are different for each of us. The socio-economic conditions that lead to blight are interwoven and complicated, but there is one thing for sure, the visual and psychological effects of dilapidated buildings and vacant lots are a major impediment for any neighborhood's redevelopment.

The Downtown Mobile Alliance has a blight initiative to identify blighted buildings in Downtown and encourage property owners to repair the deteriorating conditions. The Blight Task Force is focusing on building conditions which are allowing exposure of the structure to the elements. This approach is being used because water is a building's worst enemy and if these blighting conditions can be rectified before it is too late, then the building can survive to be redeveloped. The task force is offering property owners assistance with the Architectural Review Board and The City of Mobile's Urban Development Department for those property owners who are unsure of where to start first.

Blight is a drain on an entire neighborhood. In repeated surveys, users and property owners continue to complain about the blighting conditions in downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. Downtown's regular users can become so accustomed to the decay that it actually becomes "normal," but visitors to downtown Mobile notice every vacant and decaying building.

Buildings open to the elements invite damage and contribute to negative perceptions about downtown.





Alliance Board Member Receives National Recognition

Stephen Carter recently was honored by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) with induction into the Council of Fellows for 2011. Fellowship is among the highest honors the ASLA bestows on members and recognizes the contributions of these individuals to their profession and the society at large based on their works, leadership and management, knowledge and service. Stephen was commended for his 30-year leadership of the ASLA at the chapter and national levels and his efforts to support African Americans becoming landscape architects. He produced the first ASLA directory of African-American landscape architects and drafted its policy of equal opportunity.

“Membership” continued from page 5

town involvement. The Downtown Mobile Alliance is a good friend to have on your side if you’re a downtown business owner,” says new member, Justin Crabtree, owner of Cabo Coastal Cantina. The Alliance strives to offer services that are of value and prove beneficial to each unique business. Each Alliance member receives special promotion through our print and radio advertisements, advanced and exclusive invitations to our events, access to our resources, assistance from our staff, and use of our board room. Members receive reduced rates in our LoDa Guide, discounts on our ticketed activities, and eligibility for election to the Downtown Mobile Alliance Board of Directors.

Although there are many reasons to join the Downtown Mobile Alliance as a member, the most rewarding part according to Sam Covert of Alabama Power, “is knowing that you are a part of the continued renaissance of our great downtown.”

With 32 new businesses opening downtown over the past year, an emerging retail scene, and events such as North Pole Stroll on Royal Street bringing 4500 visitors to play in our streets, it’s evident that Downtown Mobile is growing. There’s never been a better time to get involved with the Alliance by joining as a member. Your financial support is crucial to Downtown Mobile’s continued growth.

For more information or details on membership levels, please contact a Downtown Mobile Alliance staff member at 251.434.8498.

The Downtown Mobile Alliance would like to give a special thank you to our newest members:

Mobile Airport Authority - Leadership Council

- Vickers, Riis, Murray & Curran - Business Advocate
- Cabo Coastal Cantina - Business Supporter
- Cathedral Square Gallery - Business Supporter
- Crescent Theater – Business Supporter
- dakinstreet architecture - Business Supporter
- Innerspaice – Business Supporter
- Optera Creative - Business Supporter

“Retail” continued from page 2

In a third article, a shopping center developer in Atlanta is starting a program called “Set Up Shop” wherein they will seek out and nurture local entrepreneurs interested in expanding a business or starting a new one. They have teamed up with SCORE to provide consulting services to the retailers. Sound familiar? Sounds a lot like what Springboard to Success is trying to do with the Urban Emporium. Prospective Urban Emporium tenants are sought based on targeted retailing needs, many of which have been expressed by customers. Tenant’s business plans are reviewed and enhanced by a financial expert. A boutique retail business consultant meets monthly with the tenants to assist them in the growth of their business. Educational meetings are a part of the nurturing environment too.

Finally, the cover story on department stores in the March issue predicts a shift among department stores wherein the best will nestle in the 400 or so blue-chip malls and leave the remaining 800 malls to reinvent their tenant mix. Look to see anchors like Best Buy, Costco, and Target in class B & C malls. Simultaneously, they predict the best specialty stores will move into “urban locations.” Unfortunately, for now that means places like New York, DC, and Denver, but I believe it will not be long before that trend trickles down to smaller tier cities. That said, it will only be the ones that really have their act together that attract these quality retailers and that means excellent public spaces, modernized properties and landlords, and commercial districts that look and feel safe.

Recently, the following quote was offered by Paco Underhill, a highly respected expert on retailing and the author of *Why We Buy*: “Everyone is trying to make the transition from being a landlord to being a place maker.” The “everyone” he is referring to in this quote is the mall developer. Certainly, that is what we at the Downtown Alliance strive to do every day – enhance this “place” so that you, a potential customer, choose to come to Downtown Mobile over all the other shopping/dining/entertainment options available to you. What will make this effort most successful is a buy-in from all of the stakeholders – property owners/landlords, retailers and restaurateurs, government leaders, property managers, and the citizens and visitors – that excellence in the experience offered is the only acceptable path. Only then will this beautiful and most historic part of our region reach its destiny to be a most charming and delightful place.

— Elizabeth Sanders, President

Bikes and Pedestrians Gain Attention in Planning Processes

by Carol Hunter



Mobilians on Bikes in Downtown Mobile

You can't help but notice how quickly the population of bicycles is expanding in the Port City. More and more families can be seen biking together along less busy streets, and the popularity of the Mobilians on Bikes' weekend excursions is growing exponentially. And though there is great local resistance to the idea of sharing public rights-of-way with folks on two wheels, the demand for the creation of bikable neighborhoods is about to descend on the detractors like a Tour de France peloton.

New Urban thinkers, such as Chris Leinberger of the Brookings Institute, believe city leaders ultimately will have no choice. Mobile must include all modes of transportation in future road projects, or it will continue to lose population, along with its ability to attract investment, they say. Leinberger's research finds that both baby boomers and their children, who comprise the two biggest demographic groups in the country, seek walkable/bikable neighborhoods. If Mobile fails to provide the infrastructure to attract them, the city will find itself unable to compete with cities that are embracing the concept.

Fortunately, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), those folks responsible for planning major transportation projects in the Mobile area, understands the need for this fundamental shift in how the city devotes resources. They have organized a committee of 23 stakeholders and transportation planners to advise the MPO on bicycle and pedestrian matters. The initial focus of the committee will be the implementation of the Walking/Biking Trail developed for Mobile County's bicentennial celebration. Currently funding is not available for major aspects of the plan, but the committee will prioritize those projects that can be accomplished with little money or use of other resources.

In the meantime, consider biking to work sometime during the month of May. The League of American Bicyclists is sponsoring National Bike Month to promote cycling as a viable option to cars in everyday transportation...not just recreation on weekends! If you'd like more information about the event, visit www.bikeleague.org.



Saturday, April 7, 2012

10:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

**Bienville Square and Cathedral Square
Downtown Mobile**

**Easter Egg Hunt—Easter Bonnet Parade—Kids Karaoke
Face Painting—Balloon Art—Hat Making—and More!**

www.downtownmobile.org