

# FORWARD BRUNSWICK

## *PLAN REVIEW*

### **OVERVIEW**

In April, 2021, Forward Brunswick contracted Georgia Conservancy, Inc. to conduct a review of past plans and reports focusing on Downtown Brunswick. Forward Brunswick recognized that the documents set forth in the scope of the analysis already embodied significant planning effort. As a result, a need was identified to review, summarize, and synthesize the information presented in the past plans and reports in order to emerge with an understanding of major and recurring themes, priorities, and recommendations.

The purposes of the plan analysis were to 1) highlight commonalities in planning actions and recommendations over time to identify persistent themes in the Brunswick area, and 2) to assist Forward Brunswick, by way of this synthesis, in determining where the organization might most effectively direct its energies, efforts, and investments. This memorandum includes a description of the methodology of the review process, metadata of the plans reviewed, brief summaries of each plan, findings, and gaps and recommendations.

## METHODOLOGY

Georgia Conservancy reviewed a collection of 13 prior plans and reports identified in collaboration with Forward Brunswick. The planning documents are enumerated in Table 1. Each document was read with the purpose of extracting key recommendations to synthesize them in a comparative analysis. Georgia Conservancy completed a summary of each document, extracted key recommendations, identified commonalities among themes and specific recommendations within the documents, and mapped elements with a geographic component.

After the documents were reviewed, recommendations were categorized into four recurring themes: Revitalization, Growth, Liveability, and Catalytic Sites. These recommendations were sorted based on the *type* of initiative they represent: Policy, Action, or Strategy. (A description of each theme and of the three descriptive types follows in the “Summary” section of this memo). The results of the categorization process were formatted in a matrix table for clarity. The table depicts the sorting of the recommendations into the first three recurring themes. The final theme, Catalytic Sites, was not conducive to this sorting process. Instead, Catalytic Sites were listed in another table showing the overlap of their mention among several different documents. The matrix table of recommendations is included as Appendix I.

While the tables mentioned above represent the most substantive deliverables of the plan review, Georgia Conservancy undertook subsidiary tasks to add detail to the review process. Maps were produced for elements that had a geographic component (Appendix II). A list of funding mechanisms and investment strategies (Appendix III) was also compiled, organized by plan.

Once the nature of the recurring themes was understood and all data was sorted for relevancy, Georgia Conservancy moved to identifying gaps in the studies and considerations for Forward Brunswick. These are explained in the final sections of this memo.

## SUMMARY INFORMATION OF PLANS REVIEWED

Document	Year	Preparer(s)
Blueprint Brunswick	2008	PBS&J; Bleakly Advisory Group; Randy Roark
RSVP Downtown Brunswick*	2017	Carl Vinson Institute of Government
Envision Glynn (Glynn Co Comprehensive Plan)*	2018	Glynn County; Ecological Planning Group; RS&H
Brunswick TAD	2017	Bleakly Advisory Group
Brunswick Area Transportation Study (BATS)*	2016	MPO; RS&H
Brunswick-Altamaha Canal Study	1981	Robert-Fisher Associates
Mary Ross Waterfront Park Masterplan*	2015	Orion Planning Group; Alta Planning & Design; Roberts Civil Engineering
Revitalizing Norwich Corridor*	2018	Georgia Conservancy; Kronberg Urbanists + Architects; Symbioscity; Canvas Planning; Thompson Placemaking; Bleakly Advisory Group; City of Brunswick; Congress for the New Urbanism
Urban Redevelopment Plan*	2018	City of Brunswick
Historic Downtown Parking Plan	2007	Rich and Associates, Inc.
Bike + Walk Coastal Georgia	2020	GDOT
Brunswick Comprehensive Plan Update*	2018	City of Brunswick Department of Planning, Development & Codes
Glynn Avenue District Framework	2018	Symbioscity

*Asterisk (\*) indicates plans that included a public engagement or participation process.*

## SUMMARY

Four recurring themes emerged throughout Georgia Conservancy’s review of the 13 plans requested by Forward Brunswick: Revitalization, Growth, Liveability, and Catalytic Sites. Categorizing the plans’ contents in this way elucidates how each plan’s recommendations relate to each other. It dissolves the thematic organizations particular to each plan into a common one, thereby isolating the major threads across the planning efforts undertaken thus far. Below is a more detailed description of the themes, with sample recommendations under each. It is preceded by a brief explanation of the Policy, Action, or Strategy type scheme.

### POLICY, ACTION, OR STRATEGY

Every individual recommendation was assigned a “type” (Policy, Action, or Strategy) to better describe the nature of the recommendation.

- **Policy** – a recommendation that entails making changes to current policies or regulations, either altering existing ones or creating new ones. Recommendations to create zoning districts, laws, restrictions, regulations, or municipal agencies are assigned to this type, for example.
- **Action** – A recommendation that calls for or implies a specific action that may be taken in the short- or mid-term.
- **Strategy** – A recommendation that establishes a broad goal, the accomplishment of which will likely entail incremental progression through a combination of different kinds of steps (e.g. a combination of policy, outreach, education, leadership, etc.)

Some recommendations are cross-listed between two types. This is the case where recommendations might include a clear policy or action component, but ultimate realization would necessitate a long-term, multipronged effort.

### REVITALIZATION

This theme encompasses recommendations related to redevelopment, rehabilitation, or maintenance of existing properties or neighborhoods. Items related to code enforcement and vacancy (commercial or residential) are categorized under this theme.

## SUMMARY CONT'D

- *Sample Recommendation* — Retrofit vacant buildings in the Norwich Corridor into commercial or residential uses. It was found that the corridor could support from 100-150K square feet of new retail. Of that available space, the remainder can be residential.
- *Sample Recommendation* — Lien may be applied to delinquent properties through the Blighted Buildings Act (Derelict Property Ordinance); Create and enforce a blight ordinance; Penalties for absentee owners.

### GROWTH

Captures recommendations related to new development, in a more general way than with catalytic sites, which have a specific locational component. “Growth” also includes recommendations related to infrastructure capacity, housing, and affordability.

- *Sample Recommendation* — Consolidate permitting activities into one place, office, or responsible organization.
- *Sample Recommendation* — Invest in the development of the waterfront.

### LIVEABILITY

This category includes recommendations that are relevant to improving the quality of life of Brunswick residents. These recommendations focus on street improvements, bike/ped facilities, environmental protection, outdoor recreation, and safety.

- *Sample Recommendation* — Provide bike connectivity to the Coastal Georgia Greenway.
- *Sample Recommendation* — Mitigate crime or manage perception of high crime.

### CATALYTIC SITES

Catalytic sites are locations identified for new development or redevelopment. Four plans identified catalytic sites. The term “Catalytic” was reappropriated from the Blueprint Brunswick document. It should not be assumed that all sites will have an equal constructive, catalytic impact.

- *Sample Recommendation* — Redevelopment of Mary Ross Waterfront Park, including changes to Bay St. to encourage pedestrian crossing, and to part of Gloucester St. adjacent to the park.
- *Sample Recommendation* — Development on the Oglethorpe Block (the site formerly planned for construction of a hotel & conference center).

## CATALYTIC SITES BY PLAN

<p><b>Brunswick TAD</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mary Ross Waterfront Park</i></li> <li>• <i>Oglethorpe Block</i></li> <li>• Marina Residential Mixed-Use</li> <li>• Norwich Residential Infill</li> <li>• Norwich Mixed-Use</li> <li>• <i>Gloucester and Macon Housing Development</i></li> <li>• <i>East River Waterfront Site</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Brunswick RSVP</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mary Ross Waterfront Park</i></li> <li>• <i>Oglethorpe Block</i></li> <li>• Flatiron Building Rehabilitation</li> <li>• Union St. House Rehab (model project)</li> <li>• <i>Newcastle and Monck Infill*</i></li> <li>• <i>Gloucester and Macon Housing Development</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Blueprint Brunswick</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North School Site at 4<sup>th</sup> and Norwich*</li> <li>• <i>Perry School Site</i></li> <li>• <i>East River Waterfront Site</i></li> <li>• Hwy 17 &amp; causeway Site</li> <li>• Lanier Plaza Site</li> <li>• Georgia Coastal College Site</li> <li>• Hospital Site</li> <li>• <i>Newcastle &amp; Monck Infill*</i></li> <li>• Gloucester Street Catalyst Sites</li> <li>• Bay Street (street improvement)</li> <li>• 4<sup>th</sup> Street (street improvement)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Brunswick URP</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Mary Ross Waterfront Park</i></li> <li>• <i>Oglethorpe Block</i></li> <li>• <i>Perry School Site</i></li> </ul>

*Asterisk (\*) indicates catalytic sites that have since been developed.*

*Italics indicate catalytic sites that appear multiple times across different plans.*

## GAPS

The past plans reviewed as a part of this process, as well as other plans that fell outside of its scope, represent a significant body of work spanning multiple areas of focus. Still, there are elements missing from the planning record.

It is useful to recognize where gaps exist, especially when considering which topics or projects should be addressed by planning efforts in the future. However, the urgency with which these gaps are filled must be determined by the City; it may not be in the best interest of limited time or resources to prioritize filling them immediately.

- Some areas, neighborhoods, or communities within the city have received comparatively little attention to those areas in the vicinity of Downtown Brunswick, the TAD district, and Glynn Ave. Noting that the overlap in study areas among the plans may be a result of which plans were selected, Georgia Conservancy nevertheless suggests that the geography of planning work can be expanded, vis-a-vis by plans and studies focusing on areas that have not received as thorough a planning process. Increased attention on areas and aspects of the city outside of Downtown will benefit Brunswick as a whole.
- Forward Brunswick may benefit from an examination of current zoning and building code policies. Particular attention in this area is lacking in the plans reviewed. Regulations related to zoning and building may be of interest to Forward Brunswick to the extent that they align with or prevent certain goals of the organization.
- Similarly, a study devoted to the condition of housing in the city is not evident, though the subject of housing appears in several of the plans reviewed. Useful but general recommendations and demographic statistics concerning housing are made throughout the plans, but deeper knowledge and specificity on multiple facets of the housing issue (conditions, housing typologies, recommendations for new housing) would be beneficial knowledge for any future revitalization effort or strategy.
- Glynn County has devoted the Disaster Recovery and Redevelopment Plan to contingency planning in the event of a disaster and to providing recommendations related to disaster resiliency. The primary hazards identified in the plan are hurricanes, storm surges, coastal and riverine flooding, sea level rise, and tornadoes. As a coastal city, it is pivotal that Brunswick take steps to adapt to environmental changes and to mitigate the factors that exacerbate storm surge and flooding scenarios, like adopting stormwater management practices. To this end, the city will benefit from an authoritative stormwater plan and regulations that are well-integrated into site designs, regulatory frameworks, and infrastructure systems.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR FORWARD BRUNSWICK

Georgia Conservancy understands that Forward Brunswick is an organization on the cusp of revival following the worst of the COVID pandemic and is currently engaged in a strategic planning process. With this in mind, Georgia Conservancy identified a few items for Forward Brunswick to consider as they continue to define and solidify their role in the city.

First, it may be important for Forward Brunswick to define a geographic focus. Namely, the organization may choose to engage in work that has a citywide focus, that is specific to a part of the city (e.g. Downtown), or even work that has a regional component, if it strongly bears upon Brunswick. The geographic scope of the organization's work may determine the types of projects it engages. Projects of regional or citywide breadth may be more likely to necessitate planning or coordination initiatives. Localized initiatives may, conversely, better facilitate short-term action items.

There are many other organizations working in Brunswick and Glynn County that may have similar missions as Forward Brunswick. Some of these, like the Glynn-Brunswick Land Bank Authority and the Urban Redevelopment Agency, are advocated for in the plans reviewed. To avoid duplicative effort resulting from a lack of coordination, communication, or lack of clarity on the missions of external groups, Forward Brunswick should foster mutual partnerships to amend these situations, where and if they exist, and to achieve common goals.

As a final consideration, Forward Brunswick may feel that studies are needed to gather additional information, particularly where gaps exist. With the insights from the plan review process and the knowledge of the members of the organization, Forward Brunswick is in an excellent position to determine if, where, and when additional studies would be useful.

## APPENDIX I - TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY THEME

Theme	Issue	Description	Policy	Action	Strategy	Notes
Revitalization	Redevelopment, Vacancy & Blight	Establish a land bank authority. (Completed)	X			This recommendation resulted in the Glynn-Brunswick Land Bank Authority. The recommendation is fulfilled.
Revitalization	Redevelopment	Create a Tax Allocation District to help spur redevelopment investment. (Completed)	X			Brunswick RSVP recommends establishing a TAD along the waterfront, specific to that area.
Revitalization	Redevelopment	Focus demolition and redevelopment efforts to strategic blocks, especially larger ones.			X	Larger blocks may be preferred by developers because larger development sites may be less restrictive.
Revitalization	Redevelopment, Vacancy & Blight	Lien may be applied to delinquent properties through the Blighted Buildings Act (Derelict Property Ordinance). Create and enforce a blight ordinance. Penalties for absentee owners.	X	X		A blight ordinance could pin fees or levy additional taxes on ill-maintained properties. For properties deemed a public nuisance, a jurisdiction may apply liens to the property for the cost of inspection, repairs, etc., or it may condemn the property for demolition.
Revitalization	Redevelopment, Vacancy & Blight	Retrofit vacant buildings in the Norwich Corridor into commercial or residential uses. It was found that the corridor could support from 100-150K square feet of new retail. Of that available space, the remainder can be residential.			X	Almost half of the buildings (45%) in the Norwich Corridor study area were thought to be vacant. A tenth of the corridor was undeveloped. Redevelopment, retrofits, and new development on Norwich St. should prioritize lands closer to downtown so that they may be mutually reinforcing.
Revitalization	Vacancy & Blight	Maintain strict code enforcement to limit further deterioration of properties.		X		The need for strict code enforcement is mentioned frequently, and the RSVP Brunswick plan cites inconsistent enforcement.
Revitalization	Redevelopment	Foster redevelopment and/or revitalization of disinvested residential areas.			X	

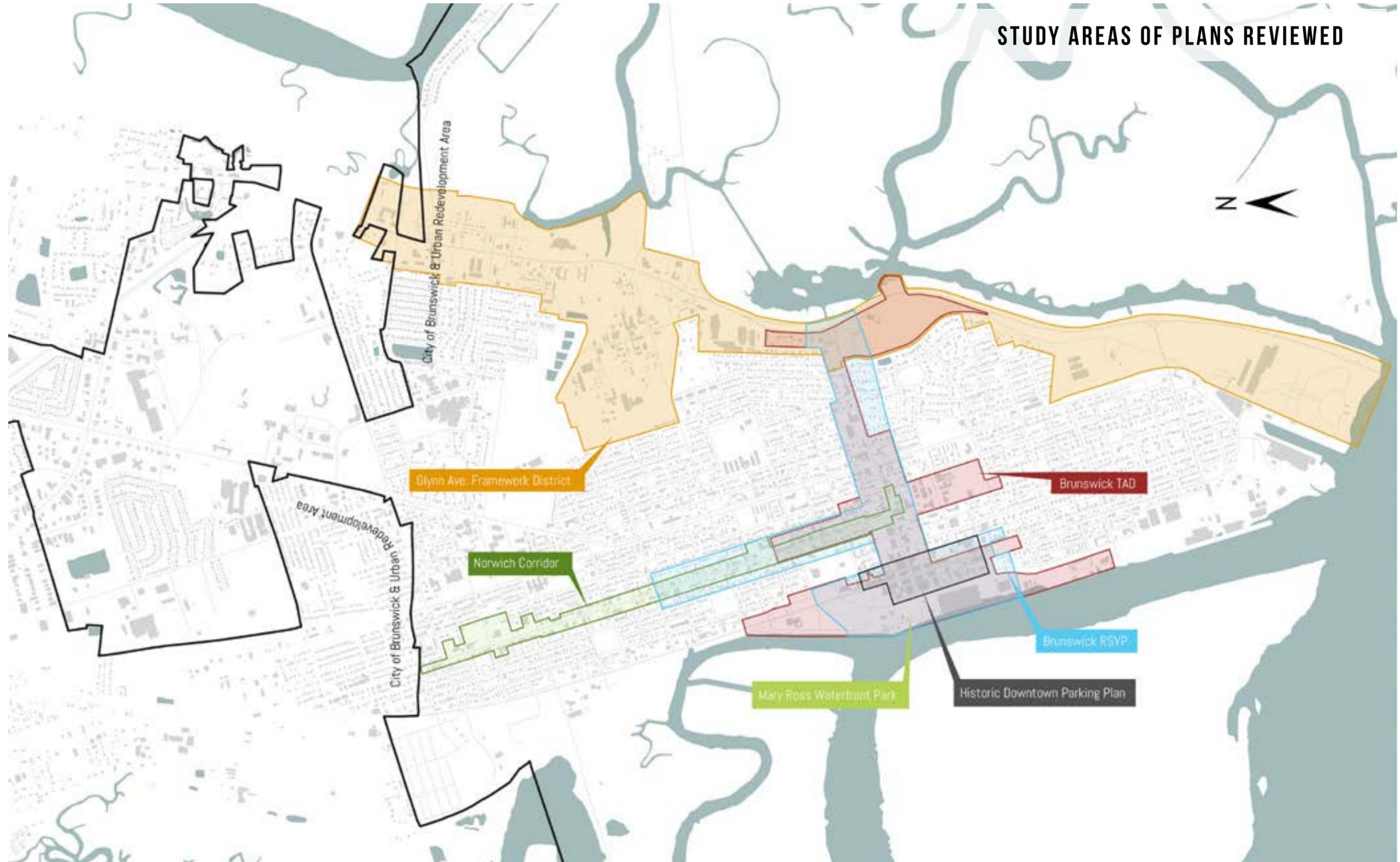
<b>Revitalization</b>	Redevelopment, Vacancy & Blight	Use code enforcement to identify properties that may be brought into the redevelopment process, but redevelop houses only when they become vacant.		X	X	There may be a vacancy period (~1 yr) before property may be targeted, or it may be immediate upon an end of tenancy. The legal stipulations relative to this recommendation should be consulted.
<b>Revitalization</b>	Redevelopment	Utilize Historic Tax Credits to renovate eligible properties and educate property owners on the benefits they could receive through preserving/renovating historic properties.			X	Historic tax credits may be used on eligible properties listed on the official national or state historic registers.
<b>Revitalization</b>	Redevelopment	Expand façade improvements program.	X		X	Expand funds dedicated to façade improvements, increase pursuit of façade improvement grants from other sources, and educate owners on opportunities.
<b>Revitalization</b>	Redevelopment	Repurpose/redevelop underutilized big box retail along Spur 25.			X	
<b>Revitalization</b>	Redevelopment, Public Space	Invest in the restoration of facilities in public parks and squares.		X		
<b>Revitalization</b>	Redevelopment, Brownfields	Promote the clean-up and redevelopment of brownfields.			X	This recommendation may be fulfilled by a Brownfields Redevelopment Authority or tucked into an existing agency.
<b>Growth</b>	Process	Consolidate permitting activities into one place, office, or responsible organization.		X		
<b>Growth</b>	Process	Strengthen coordination and communication between governmental entities.		X		Improve coordination between levels of government and different city departments.
<b>Growth</b>	Infrastructure	Identify organization that could guide city investment in infrastructure.			X	Both the Brunswick TAD and the Urban Redevelopment Plan (Urban Redevelopment Agency) documents state that they should guide city investment in infrastructure. If a lead is desired, a single organization should be identified.

<b>Growth</b>	Infrastructure	Encourage growth where infrastructure capacity exists and consider the impact of new development on infrastructure.	X		X	Impact fees may be instituted to go towards funding infrastructure improvements. Also, the Revitalizing Norwich Corridor plan notes high sewer tap fees for new development in the area.
<b>Growth</b>	Development	Invest in the development of the waterfront.			X	This recommendation notably appears in the Glynn County Comprehensive Plan and is a primary topic of some local area plans (e.g. Mary Ross Waterfront Park Masterplan).
<b>Growth</b>	Housing, Affordability	Permit increased housing density and encourage housing choice (housing variety).	X		X	This recommendation appears in the Glynn County Comprehensive plan and relates to recommendations for new development, retrofits, and infill development to boost the housing stock.
<b>Growth</b>	Housing	Invest in lofts above retail in downtown.			X	
<b>Growth</b>	Housing	Invest in a variety of affordable housing.			X	General recommendation to increase affordability and housing choice. Increase stock through rehab and new construction.
<b>Growth</b>	Housing, Affordability	Focus on creating mixed-income housing developments.			X	More than one plan notes that a large proportion of households in Brunswick are cost burdened. The Brunswick TAD plan puts this figure at 45.7%.
<b>Growth</b>	Housing, Affordability, Homeownership	Continue homeownership education and down-payment assistance programs.			X	Help augment homeownership, especially to alleviate rental tenancy in properties with structural issues.
<b>Growth</b>	Senior Housing	Create senior housing, especially in walkable locations, and increase homestead exemption for senior homeowners.	X		X	A need for senior housing was identified in Blueprint Brunswick (2008).
<b>Liveability</b>	Environment	Address risks associated with coastal flooding.		X	X	Improve drainage facilities, have a disaster preparedness program, and continue to enforce policies to mitigate issues that exacerbate flooding.

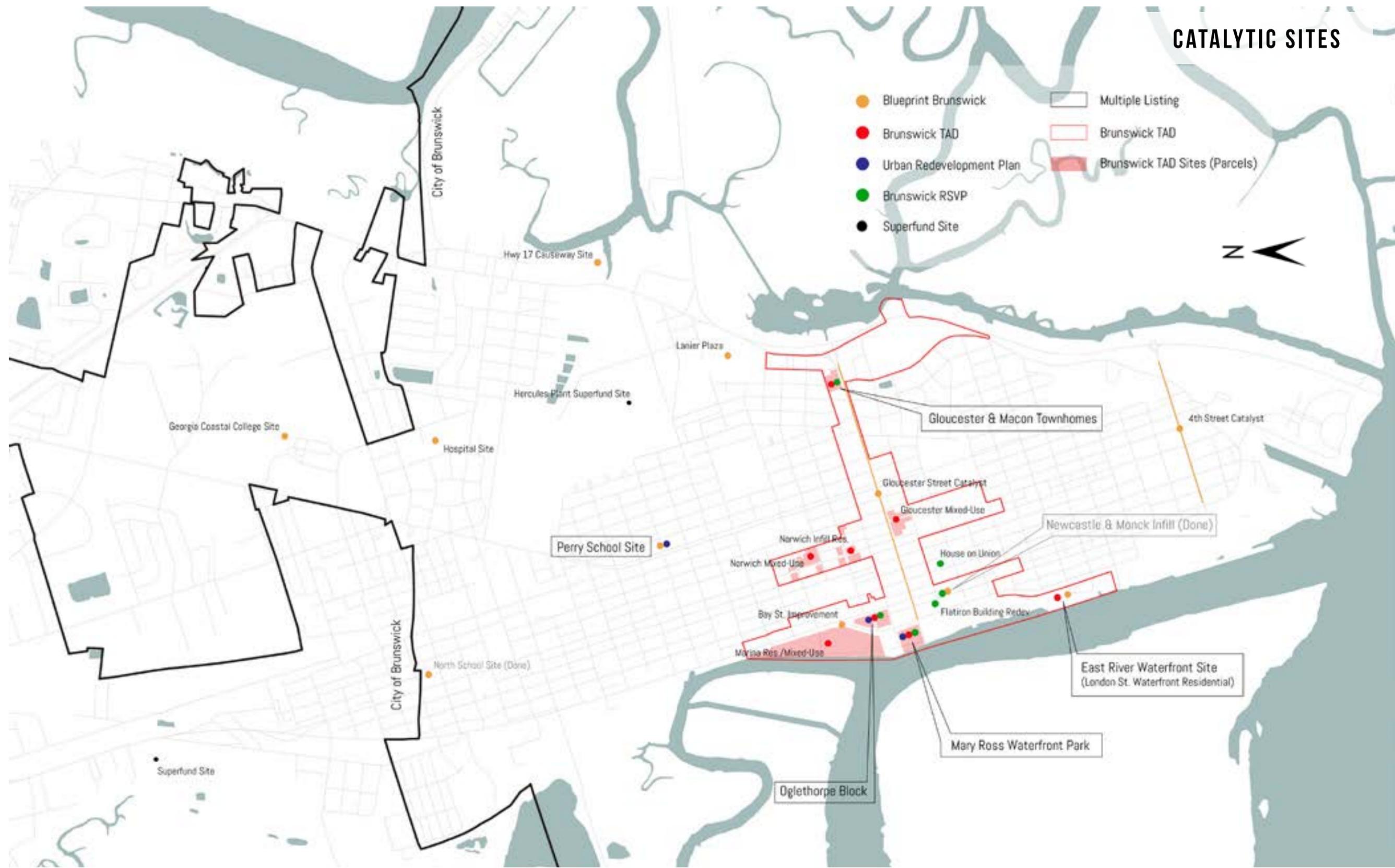
<b>Liveability</b>	Environment	Protect the city's natural resources.			X	Protect marshes, rivers, and trees in and around the city boundaries. Maintain a marsh buffer to allow marsh to migrate in light of sea level rise.
<b>Liveability</b>	Safety	Mitigate crime or manage perception of high crime.			X	Safety is a recurring top concern for residents. Overall, Glynn County ranked in the bottom 10% in safety of GA counties (Glynn Co Comp Plan). Measures that may help to reduce crime and bolster the feeling of safety mentioned in the Norwich Revitalization Plan include increasing lighting, reestablishing Neighborhood Watches, and increasing residential density to provide passive monitoring (more eyes on the street).
<b>Liveability</b>	Mobility	Implement Complete Streets guidelines. (Completed)	X	X		Complete Streets is a policy and design approach that requires streets to be designed for access and use by multiple modes of transit and by users of different ages and abilities. Complete Streets Ordinance adopted in 2017.
<b>Liveability</b>	Bike/Ped, Recreation	Provide bike connectivity to Coastal Georgia Greenway.		X		The East Coast Greenway, which intersects with the Coastal Georgia Greenway, will pass along the outskirts of Brunswick (Hwy 17). The Coastal Georgia Greenway passes through Brunswick.
<b>Liveability</b>	Bike/Ped	Promote street improvements that facilitate walkability and easy pedestrian connection across the street. (e.g. improvements to Bay St. to improve connection between the waterfront and downtown)		X	X	Bay St. is a specific example related to this recommendation. The configuration of the street is cited as a barrier between downtown and Mary Ross Waterfront Park, and a hindrance to reactivating the waterfront.
<b>Liveability</b>	Mobility	Promote alternative modes of transportation.			X	A county-wide goal that includes providing some sort of public transit option. A need for some form of public transit was identified in the Brunswick Area Transportation Study (BATS). However, this recommendation is not specific to public transit. Promoting bike and pedestrian transportation also contributes to this goal.
<b>Liveability</b>	Parking	There is no urgent need to increase the parking supply in historic downtown withstanding no major redevelopment or change in current conditions.			X	The Historic Downtown Parking Plan identified a parking surplus. Capacity was predicted to be sufficient to meet future demand, even with the redevelopment of the Oglethorpe Block (formerly planned Convention Center), which has not yet

						occurred. Parking occupancy was measured at 53% during the peak parking period of noon to 1 PM. Anecdotally, Brunswick RSVP mentions that the downtown parking situation was a concern that arose during their public engagement process, but whether this was related to parking capacity, traffic, or facilities (striping, condition of stalls) is unclear.
<b>Liveability</b>	Design	Use or refer to the Glynn Avenue District Framework design guidelines to guide building design standards in other geographies.	X		X	The Glynn Avenue District Framework document provides extensive recommendations on aesthetic, appropriate, and/or improved street and building (architectural) design.
<b>Liveability</b>	Programming, Placemaking	Continue to activate parts of the waterfront with events and recreational programs.		X		Continue hosting the farmer's market at Mary Ross Waterfront Park and, if the opportunity exists, look for additional ways to schedule the space.
<b>Liveability</b>	Community, Development	Invest in quality neighborhoods. Locate services and community resources in or near neighborhoods.			X	
<b>Liveability</b>	Community	Foster increased participation and involvement in poor and disenfranchised communities.		X	X	
<b>Liveability</b>	Image	Improve appearance of significant aspects/areas of the city.		X		Improve appearance of dilapidated buildings and areas in or along Brunswick's gateways.

STUDY AREAS OF PLANS REVIEWED



# CATALYTIC SITES



## APPENDIX III - INVESTMENT STRATEGIES BY PLAN

<p><b>Blueprint Brunswick</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a TAD</li> <li>• Create a Land Bank Authority</li> <li>• Create Brunswick Housing Enterprise Zone</li> <li>• CHIP (Community Housing Improvement Program) funds</li> <li>• Public-Private Partnerships</li> <li>• Opportunity Zones</li> <li>• Enterprise Zones</li> </ul>
<p><b>RSVP Downtown Brunswick</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Riverfront TAD</li> <li>• Penalties for absentee owners</li> <li>• Façade improvement programs and grants</li> <li>• Historic Tax Credits</li> </ul>
<p><b>Envision Glynn</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact Fees, to fund infrastructure improvements</li> <li>• Seek funding for Brunswick’s port</li> </ul>
<p><b>Brunswick TAD</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tax exempt bonds, secured by loans or grants, for redevelopment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Revitalizing Norwich Corridor</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage DOT funding for bike/ped improvements</li> <li>• Develop a “Blight Ordinance”</li> <li>• Leverage existing Enterprise Zone covering Norwich Corridor</li> </ul>
<p><b>Urban Redevelopment Plan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public-Private Partnerships</li> <li>• Opportunity Zone Tax Credits</li> <li>• Revolving loan funds</li> <li>• Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)</li> <li>• CHIP</li> <li>• Revitalization Area Strategy (RIS/CHIP) grants</li> <li>• DCA Homeownership Program</li> <li>• USDA programs</li> <li>• Downtown-focused:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ DCA Downtown Development Revolving Loan Fund and Redevelopment Fund</li> <li>○ Tax Exempt Bond Financing</li> <li>○ Historic Tax Credits</li> <li>○ New Market Tax Credits</li> <li>○ The Georgia Cities Foundation Revolving Loan Fund</li> <li>○ TAD</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Bike+Walk Coastal Georgia</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal Sources:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ BUILD grants</li> <li>○ Surface Transportation Block Grants (Z230)</li> <li>○ Transportation Alternatives Program (Z301)</li> <li>○ Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnerships Program (ORLP)</li> <li>○ Recreation Trails Program (RTP)</li> <li>○ Coastal Incentive Grant (CIG)</li> <li>○ Federal Land Access Program (FLAP)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• State Sources:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSP)</li> <li>• Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Other Sources:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ SPLOST</li> <li>○ TSPLIST</li> <li>○ General Funds (e.g. bonds, impact fees)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>