

HOW GREENVILLE DID IT

It wasn't magic, but little by little, Greenville, S.C., has become the poster child for downtown renewal.

Nancy Whitworth, director of economic development in Greenville, refers to the city as a "30-year overnight success."

"We had a plan," says Whitworth, who has worked with the city's economic development for 26 years. "We've stuck to that plan. We've been patient, and we followed what, for us, was a logical process."

First, the city of 56,000 improved the attractiveness of its downtown by widening sidewalks, planting trees and reducing traffic lanes. Then it focused on identifying things that could be done through public and private partnerships, paying great attention to detail and working with a master landscape plan for downtown. It also encouraged public art and focused on office space. Then downtown entertainment events were increased to encourage more restaurants.

In 30 years, the city has invested approximately \$200 million in public monies, including federal funds, in re-creating downtown Greenville, according to Whitworth.

"We created an environment that we didn't have: an attractive downtown," Whitworth says.

The first project, Greenville Commons, opened in 1982 and houses the Hyatt Regency Hotel and Conference Center, office and

retail. Of the \$34 million cost, \$10 million came from public funds.

Other projects followed.

The Peace Center for the Performing Arts. The Bi-Lo Center arena. More hotel rooms. Parking garages. Lots of restaurants. A baseball stadium. Residential.

Some projects were centered around city-owned parking garages, adding to their appeal for private investment.

"The hottest market is now mixed-use," Whitworth adds. "Slowly, we're moving into more retail."

Greenville now has more than 1,200 residential units downtown, and 35 percent of them were built in the past five years.

Another new type of project, Pendleton West, is scheduled for completion in 2007. It will include 14 single-family homes, two duplexes and a park in phase 1, plus a mixed-use building of commercial space, condos and attached townhomes with gated access to the town homes, and a private park.

The city has to set aside \$150,000 in Community Development Block Grant Funds for use to buy down the sales price on 25 percent of the residential units in the project. The intent is to create housing that will be affordable to the workforce since downtown housing now costs some \$240 a square foot. Calculate it; 1,200 square feet of living space costs \$288,000.

Pendleton West was made possible because the city reacquired land it had donated years ago for a public hospital when the facility closed. In addition, the city bought and tore down a motel where activity was considered a nuisance, Whitworth notes.

And, there was a bit of magic for Greenville. A waterfall in downtown has been incorporated into Reedy River Falls Park.

Reedy River flows through the city and although Whitworth says most people would consider it a branch or a creek and not a river, the city increased its water depth through damming. The result is a waterfront that brings in visitors as well as locals and that has attracted more investors.

Phase I of RiverPlace involved more than \$35 million in private investment and includes a riverwalk promenade connecting Falls Park on the Reedy to another park. It also combines residential units with a new Hampton Inn and Suites.

Growth has followed the river and now moved into West End, an area of the city that previously had not attracted investors, according to Whitworth.

"We still have plenty to do," she says. That includes eventually relocating its public works facilities to make way for a new park.

- SBK



The Bookends, an eight-story mixed use project in Greenville, S.C., includes 30 residential units and fronts a new city parking garage; the first floor has retail and commercial space.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF GREENVILLE, S.C.