

Downtown Revitalization Strategy

Florence, South Carolina

At the time the Strategy 5 Principal was engaged to lead a multi-disciplinary team in a downtown revitalization effort for the City of Florence, W. Evans St. commercial space was experiencing a near 70% vacancy rate. Surrounding neighborhoods were peppered with vacant lots, housing in poor condition, and safety was a critical issue. Retail demand had been attracted to suburban shopping malls, and there was only one small café restaurant in the downtown area.

The revitalization strategy was based on a market analysis that recognized the need for a complete make over of the downtown built environment, including building facades, streetscapes, and landscaping. It also recognized the desirability of creating some type of destination attraction in the downtown area. A complete set of Design Standards was developed, and a joint venture between Francis Marion University, the Florence Little Theater, and the Florence Downtown Development Corporation resulted in a Performing Arts Center that has been a major catalyst for reinvestment and a renaissance for Florence.

A real estate inventory of vacant and underutilized neighborhood properties was conducted and incorporated into a marketing and recruitment program that has been successful in attracting new residential opportunities for residents. The result has been a re-knit downtown community.



Downtown Florence today is experiencing less than 6% vacancy in its W. Evans St. store fronts and buildings, now occupied with a good mix of retail shops, cafes and restaurants, arts venue, and a boutique hotel.