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Tactical Urbanism

4.0 TACTICAL URBANISM

Figure 4.1a: Tactical Urbanism Example, Photo courtesy: http://bettercities.net

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Tactical Urbanism is a strategy utilized in community planning that applies small-scale, low-cost improvements to revitalize a community. Tactical Urbanism strategies can be temporary or semi-permanent and always respond to a particular local need or situation. Because these strategies are small-scale and low-cost they have the ability to be implemented quickly without much permitting, fundraising, and design or construction demands. This leads to "immediate" change that can excite residents and maintain community momentum between the time it takes to implement larger-scale, higher-cost projects. Ideas include a community garden at a vacant and underutilized street corner; a volleyball net or basketball hoop set-up in a temporarily closed street in a neighborhood where these amenities aren't common; or a ping-pong table and trees displayed in a parallel parking space to create an outdoor play area. These strategies allow for ideas and concepts to be tested and temporarily applied to a community before a substantial political or financial commitment is made. Refer to figures 4.1a and 4.1b. [4.1]

Tactical Urbanism interventions are most successful when they are implemented by or in partnership with the local community. Residents have the knowledge of local challenges and needs and have the presence to continue implementing Tactical Urbanism strategies year-round. Engaging local residents also allows them to see the potential that their community has and leads to a community involved in and excited about making change to revitalize their local spaces.

These small-scale strategies are the first step in making lasting change in a community, as long-range planning and redevelopment can take significant amounts of time and effort to implement. Coupling these strategies with long-term planning efforts, however, is imperative. Tactical Urbanism strategies are most beneficial and can have a greater impact when they address community

Figure 4.1b: Examples of Tactical Urbanism

visions and goals that are part of a longer term planning effort.

4.2 TACTICAL URBANISM LITHONIA

Lithonia is an ideal place to utilize the techniques of Tactical Urbanism. In recent years, this small community has seen many planning initiatives with little implementation and residents are ready to see action. With little public funding to implement redevelop efforts now, these small-scale, low-cost strategies allow for change to begin. Lithonia's supportive and engaged residents and community partners, such as the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance, also make this city a great place to implement these ideas. As Tactical Urbanism needs the support and engagement of local citizens to continue the efforts, Lithonia's active residents and partners can champion these ideas into the future.

4.2.1 TACTICAL URBANISM GOALS

The Tactical Urbanism strategies as discussed in the remainder of this chapter were generated in response to the local assets and challenges that were identified throughout the *Blueprints* process and are further discussed in Chapter 3.

The particular assets, challenges and goals set out for these strategies are outlined in Figure 4.2a. These challenges include addressing the lack of programmed public/open space for people to gather, an undocumented Lithonia history, a lack of signage denoting assets throughout the city, and an inactive downtown streetscape. Additionally, stakeholders expressed concern that visitors were not coming into their town because Lithonia holds a negative perception due to past political issues.

The assets that the Tactical Urbanism strategies are

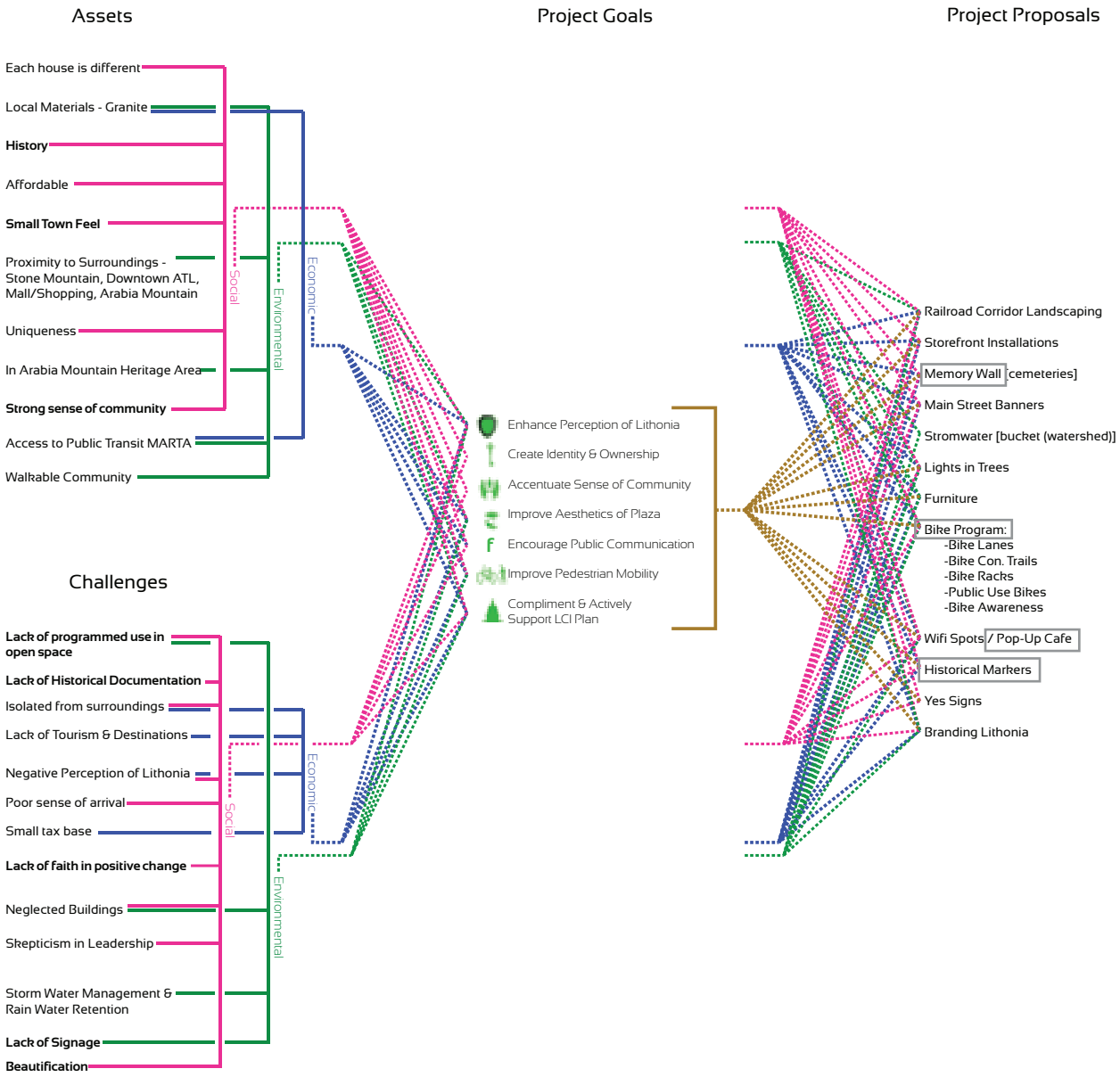


Figure 4.2a: Project Strategy Chart

responding to include: Lithonia's rich history, Lithonia's strong sense of community and engaged population, Lithonia's many amenities including access to Arabia and Panola Mountains and the nearby Big Ledge Quarry, and Lithonia's Main Street with its historic buildings, walkable sidewalks, and small town character.

In response to these identified challenges and assets the following goals were identified: Enhance the perception of Lithonia to encourage citizens and visitors to enjoy Lithonia's many nearby assets and excite them about future amenities and development; create an identity for Lithonia that builds on its rich history and small town character; accentuate the sense of community by engaging citizens in the process of implementing Tactical Urbanism strategies; improve the aesthetics of the Lithonia Plaza so that citizens and visitors will come and enjoy downtown; create awareness about Lithonia's history and assets; improve non-automotive mobility and access to surrounding amenities; and compliment ideas

and recommendations that were identified within the 2003 Livable Centers Initiative report.

4.2.2 TACTICAL URBANISM STRATEGIES

To address the identified goals, five Tactical Urbanism projects are proposed within this chapter: 1. Historic Marker, an installation to identify and communicate the lost history of Lithonia; 2. Bike Lithonia, a program to direct bicyclists to downtown Lithonia and to surrounding amenities; 3. Pop-Up Cafe, a wooden platform that provides seating and signage for businesses along Main Street; 4. Story-Telling Bench, an installation that provides a gathering space for community members to share their stories of Lithonia; and 5. Project Lithonia, an event to engage and excite the community about the future of Lithonia and showcase examples of how the above four installations could be implemented.

The Project Lithonia Event, held on December 4th, 2011, included the installation of examples of the proposed Tactical Urbanism projects along Main Street. This important street represents Lithonia's historic downtown as it was once the heart of the community. To this day portions of it still hold the character of the small town Main Street it once was with several historic buildings. Placing the example Tactical Urbanism projects here, as well as encouraging the community to install future Tactical Urbanism projects along Main Street, attempts to address the challenge of revitalizing downtown and reviving Main Street as the heart of the community.

The remainder of this chapter further describes the four proposed installations and the Project Lithonia event. The recommended partnerships to implement these ideas can be found in Chapter 7: Recommendations.

Bike Lithonia

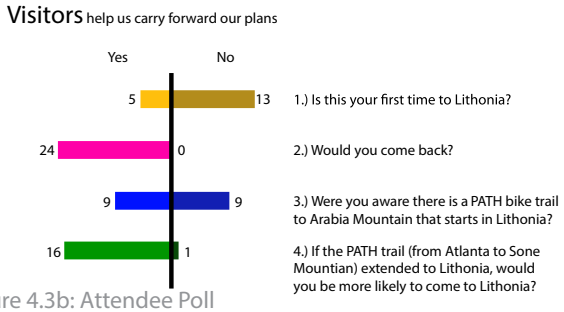
Pop-Up Cafe

Historical Marker

Story-Telling Bench

Figure 4.2b: Tactical Urbanism Proposals

Figure 4.3a: Urban Projection event flyer



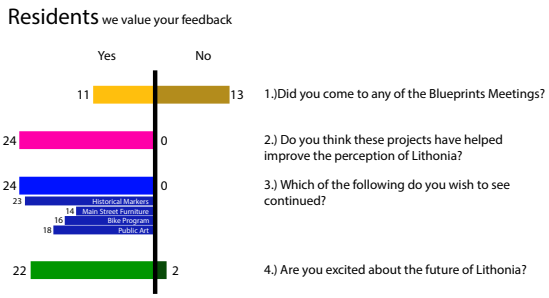


Figure 4.3b: Attendee Poll

4.3 PROJECT LITHONIA

On December 4, 2011, the *Blueprints* Team hosted the Project Lithonia event on Main Street in downtown Lithonia (refer to Figure 4.3a for the event flyer). This event had several purposes: 1. To showcase examples of the Tactical Urbanism interventions - Bike Lithonia, Pop-Up Cafe, Historical Marker, and Story-telling Bench (refer to Figure 4.3c for locations of these installations); 2. To engage and excite the community about the future of Lithonia through these installations and a projection that displayed images of the recommendations presented within this report; and 3. To combat the negative perception of Lithonia with a positive event that highlights the ideas for future change in Lithonia.

This Sunday evening event was a great success, with over 75 people in attendance. The active use of Main Street was successful in showcasing the downtown core as an asset and its potential as a great space to gather. Attendees were polled to evaluate reactions to the installations and overall excitement for Lithonia's future - the results can be found in Figure 4.3b. A video documenting the event was also created and uploaded to YouTube.com (www.youtube.com/watch?v=vytzMTxUiuI).

It is recommended that the Lithonia community continue to showcase downtown with future events, festivals and parades. A Lithonia website should be created to advertise these events and also share Lithonia's rich history and stories.

Figure 4.3c: Showcase Locations

Figure 4.4a: Bicycle Signage Installed during Project Lithonia

4.4 BIKE LITHONIA

Bike Lithonia is a Tactical Urbanism strategy that aims to utilize Lithonia's access to the PATH Foundation's Arabia Mountain Trail that extends from Arabia and Panola Mountain into Lithonia, ending blocks short of downtown at Johnson Street. The objectives of this strategy are to direct people who are utilizing this existing trail system into downtown Lithonia and to promote bicycle awareness within the community. In the long-term, a bicycle trail could move through Lithonia, to the Big Ledge Quarry, and on to the Stone Mountain Trail, completing a trail system that would connect Lithonia to Atlanta.

4.4.1 SHORT-TERM

To achieve the short-term objectives of directing people into downtown from the Arabia Mountain Trail and creating bicycle awareness in Lithonia, several installations are recommended. First, signage will be needed to direct cyclists into downtown from the existing Arabia Mountain Trail that ends abruptly at Johnson Street. Most cyclists unfamiliar with the area are unaware that Main Street is only 2 blocks away (a 1 minute bike ride). By directing riders into downtown, Lithonia will gain the opportunity to draw these visitors to restaurants, retail and other amenities in downtown. Temporary paint can be painted on the street with stencils to direct riders to Main Street, and temporary sharrows (a marking that indicates a roadway is shared by both automobiles and bicyclist) along Main Street will alert drivers to share the road with cyclist. Refer to Figure 4.4c.

Bright bicycle signage and brightly painted bikes could then be installed on the sidewalks along Main Street. This signage will identify Lithonia as a bike-friendly community and can identify and direct riders to places of interest near Lithonia - such as Arabia Mountain and Big Ledge Quarry. This recommended signage and bike installation was installed along Main Street during the December 4th Project Lithonia event. Please refer to Figure 4.4a and 4.4b for images from this installation.

Figure 4.4b: Brightly Painted Bicycles Installed during Project Lithonia

4.4.1 LONG-TERM

Bike Lithonia, in the long-term, is aimed at connecting the Arabia Mountain Trail through Lithonia, to Big Ledge Quarry and all the way to the Stone Mountain Trail, which currently connects Stone Mountain to Atlanta. This trail extension could ultimately connect Lithonia all the way to Atlanta, completing a 46-mile bike path. Refer to Figure 4.4d for a diagram of these connections.

It is recommended to continue the PATH Foundation trail from Johnson Street in two directions. The first, which diverts from downtown and provides direct access to a trail that wraps around the Big Ledge Quarry and continues on to connect with the Stone Mountain Trail. The second draws cyclists into downtown Lithonia and to places of interest through out the City - such as Main Street, the Stewart Amphitheater, the Lithonia City Park, and historic sites - and ultimately connects back to a new Big Ledge Quarry trail that continues on to the Stone Mountain Trail. Refer to Figure 4.4e for a diagram of these two trail connections.

A new trail around the Big Ledge Quarry could take advantage of this beautiful amenity, which has the potential to draw people to the area. This path is further described in Chapter 6: Long-Term Redevelopment but is identified on the maps within this section.

Figure 4.4c: Temporary Paint Stenciled on Street to Direct Cyclist to Main Street

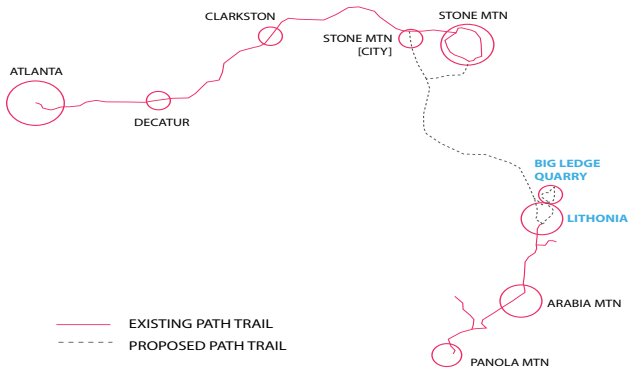


Figure 4.4d: Map of Existing and Proposed PATH trails

Sharrows and directional street signage will be an important component of these pathways and will need to be a priority in implementation. Signage on I-20 for the new bicycle paths will also help to advertise this great amenity. Recommended locations for signage along this proposed interconnected trail system is represented on Figure 4.4f. Coordination between the community, the PATH Foundation, and Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance will be crucial to determine the exact trail locations and to achieve implementation. Some stakeholders expressed concern with potential locations of the trail on residential streets where they own property. Alternative trail locations can be identified with support from the community and coordinated efforts with partner organizations.

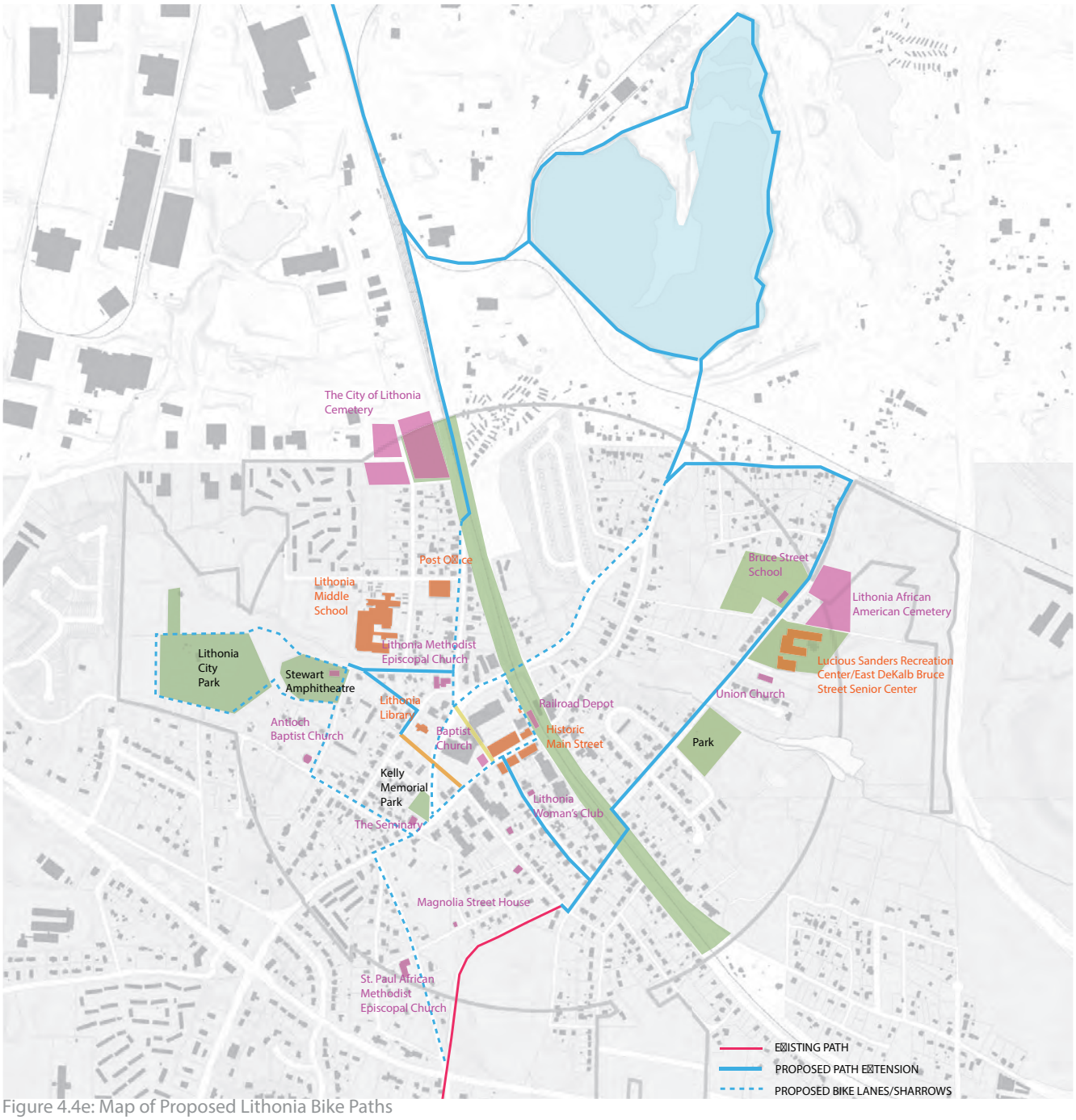


Figure 4.4e: Map of Proposed Lithonia Bike Paths

Figure 4.4f: Map of Proposed Trail Signage

Figure 4.5a: Pop-up Cafe

4.5 POP-UP CAFE

The Pop-Up Cafe is a wooden platform structure placed within a parallel parking space outside of a restaurant, cafe or retailer that provides outdoor seating and signage. This installation provides a place for gathering and socializing, ultimately, activating the streetscape in Lithonia. Refer to Figures 4.5a to 4.5e.

Signage is provided within the platform that is visible to passing automobiles and pedestrians to further promote the business with which it is associated. Signage can be changed daily (if desired) in accordance with items on the menus, daily specials, and/or hours of operation.

At the December 4th Project Lithonia event, an example pop-up cafe was placed in a parallel spot outside of Fannie Cakes Bakery Cafe on Main Street. This installation provided signage for the cafe, making passersby aware of this new downtown business. The built-in planter/bench and high-top bar provide additional objects to gather around, sit on, and place food, drinks, or merchandise. Tables and chairs take up the remainder of the platform to provide a comfortable, yet temporary, option for consuming goods or relaxing. An exercise bike was also installed on the platform to further encourage and promote the Bike Lithonia campaign, as described in Section 4.4.

The Pop-Up Cafe idea has the potential to be expanded throughout Lithonia. Restaurants, cafes and retail shops could take advantage of the advertising and seating that this installation offers. Community organizations, such as school groups, social clubs, and/or religious organizations could also sponsor a Pop-Up Cafe to advertise their events and provide public seating along sidewalks, near parks, or near public transit stops throughout the City.

The Pop-Up Cafe also has the potential to draw visitors and residents into downtown Lithonia to see and utilize this platform as it is a unique way to activate the street, generating a positive buzz about Lithonia.

Figure 4.5b: Pop-Up Cafe Outside of Fannie Cakes Bakery Cafe

Figure 4.5c: Pop-Up Cafe Signage

Figure 4.5d: Pop-Up Cafe Seating

Figure 4.5e: Pop-Up Cafe Signage

Figure 4.6a: Storytelling Bench

4.6 STORYTELLING BENCH

The Storytelling Bench is an interactive piece of public street furniture that attempts to tell the stories of Lithonia's history through text and imagery. Visitors are encouraged to write in the blank spaces on the bench back to express their stories of Lithonia. The hope is that visitors and residents will sit and relax on the bench and read, write, and share their stories.

An example of the Storytelling Bench was installed during the December 4th Project Lithonia event on Main Street. This bench shares the story of one Lithonia resident who grew up attending the Bruce Street School, DeKalb County's first African American elementary school. The cut-out figures on the bench back were inspired by artist Kara Walker, who references the complex relationship between races in her work. During the event one Lithonia resident also wrote on the bench back to express his/her story of growing up in Lithonia. This bench allowed for conversations and dialogue to begin in regards to Lithonia's history and what it was like to grow up in this small town. Refer to Figures 4.6a to 4.6f.

Storytelling Benches and similar public art that expresses Lithonia's history could be installed throughout the City in places where public interaction is encouraged and dialogue can happen, such as within parks, near the Lithonia Middle School, the Stewart Amphitheater, the Lithonia Library, cemeteries, or historic site. These installations will allow for the continued expression of Lithonia's history.

Figure 4.6b: Storytelling Bench

Figure 4.6c: Lithonian Whose Story Inspired the Bench

Figure 4.6d: Interaction with the Bench

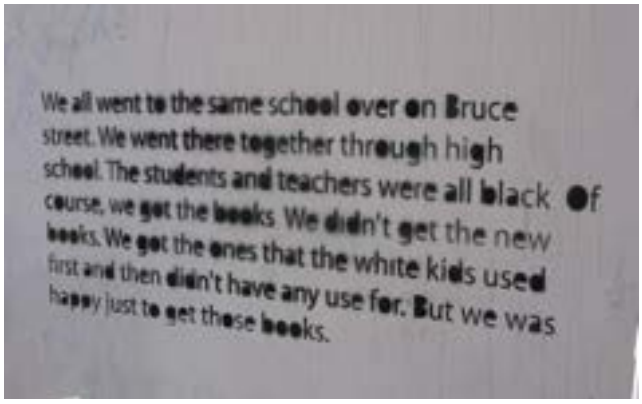


Figure 4.6e: Story and Recorded Interaction

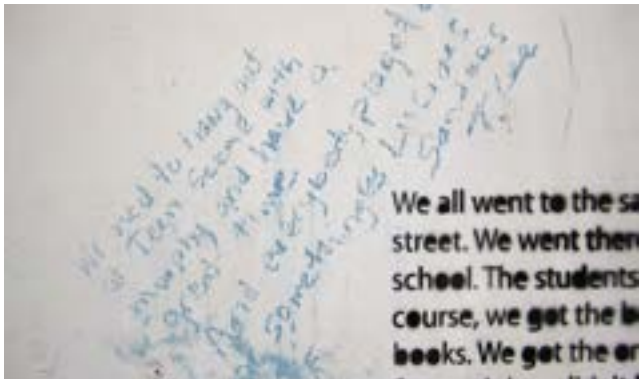


Figure 4.6f: Story and Recorded Interaction

Figure 4.7a: Lithonia Baptist Church Historic Marker

4.7 HISTORIC LITHONIA

Historic Lithonia is a proposed program that recognizes and displays Lithonia's rich history by placing historic markers throughout the community that identify historic buildings and spaces both past and present. Historic Lithonia would allow Lithonia's history to be expressed in a creative way, drawing visitors and residents around town to view and learn about important sites, buildings and spaces throughout Lithonia.

An example historic marker was placed at the site of the former Lithonia Baptist Church on Main Street during the December 4th Project Lithonia event. This church was a one hundred and five year staple on Main Street that was demolished to make way for the Lithonia Plaza in the 1960s. The historical marker was placed facing the church's original site to recognize the historical importance of this building to the community.

With the use of translucent acrylic panels, a focal point was created to demonstrate where the church would have been. The oculus of the historic marker allows for viewers to see a transparent ghosted image of the old church over the expansive asphalt parking lot that is currently there. Text is also displayed at the bottom of the marker to tell the story of this historic site. Refer to figures 4.7a to 4.7f.

Such low-cost, eye-catching historic markers could be placed throughout the City of Lithonia to indicate and tell the story of historic places, both past and present. Figure 4.7g identifies many of the historic places that could be locations for historic markers. Further research needs to be conducted to identify historic places, people and events that could be represented with these historic markers. Once markers are installed, Lithonia can promote a tour of Historic Lithonia as an economic development tool that draws visitors into Lithonia to enjoy all the amenities this city has to offer.

Figure 4.7b: Former Lithonia Baptist Church Overlaid on the Current Shopping Center

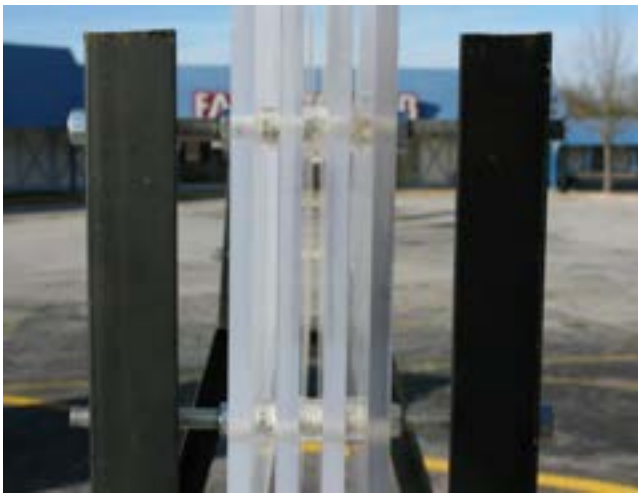


Figure 4.7c: Historic Marker Construction

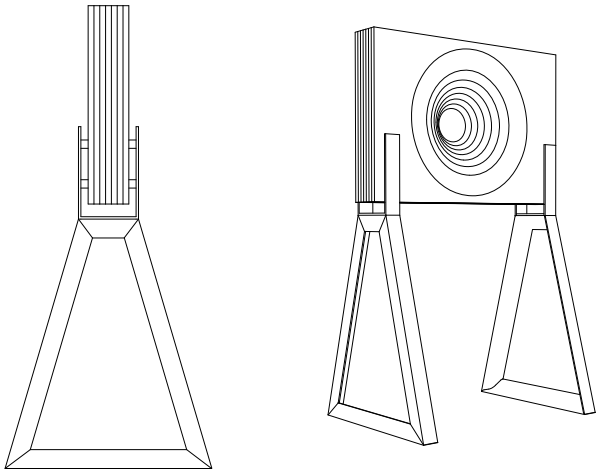


Figure 4.7d: Historic Marker Construction

As of the writing of this report, the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance was sponsoring a National Register of Historic Places application that would designate Lithonia as a national historic district. If approved, all buildings that are more than fifty years old, that retain their architectural integrity, and are located within the district boundary - the city limits plus the Davidson Road and Circle residential community - would be included on the register and, therefore, would not need to be separately submitted to the National Register of Historic Places. If the application does not pass, it is recommended that the community support the Alliance in any future resubmission of the application and/or work with the Alliance to submit individual structures for historic designation. However, it is this report's recommendation that the Historic District designation be the priority vehicle for protecting Lithonia's historic character.

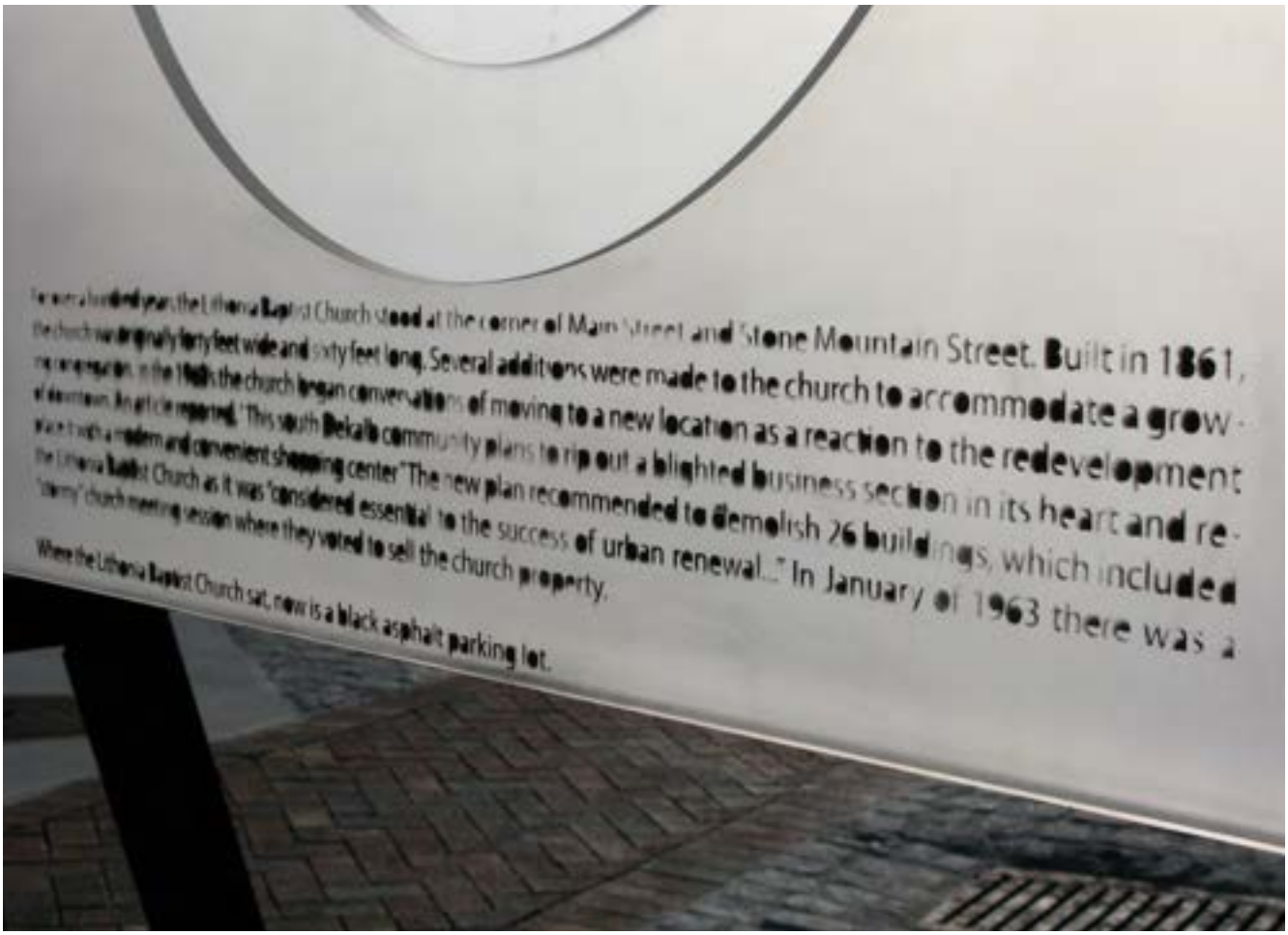


Figure 4.7e: Descriptive Text of the Historic Lithonia Baptist Church

Figure 4.7f: Lithonia Baptist Church Historic Marker

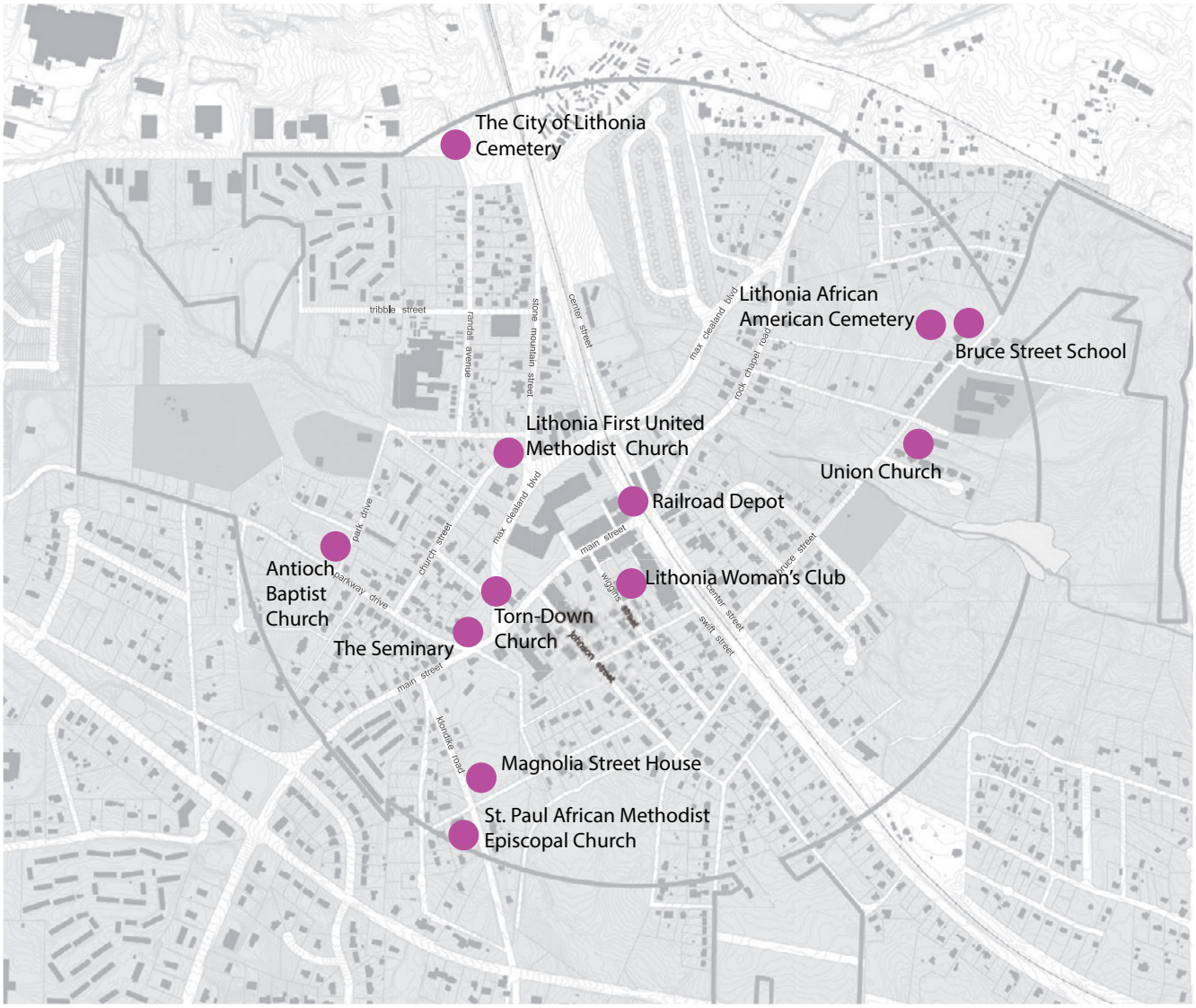


Figure 4.7g: Historical Landmarks in Lithonia

In order to truly protect the architectural integrity of a historic district, it is recommended that the City implement local historic preservation regulations and zoning. Such an approach is compatible with the Form Based Code recommendations discussed in Chapter 6. As of the writing of this report, a Georgia State University Heritage Preservation class was working with the City of Lithonia and the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance to develop proposed local district regulations. It is the recommendation of this report that the historic preservation work be considered as a contributor to a Form Based Code adoption by the City to protect the historic integrity of Lithonia, as well as, lay the groundwork for scale-appropriate redevelopment concepts as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. The Atlanta Regional Commission and DeKalb County Planning can work with the City to appropriately meld the historic preservation work and the sample Form Based Code information, as detailed in Appendix A, into a code that the City of Lithonia can adopt.