



Northwest Arkansas

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

Centerton, Arkansas

Technical Assistance Panel | February 26, 2025

About

Urban Land Institute

Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

Cover photo: An aerial view of downtown Centerton, Arkansas. (Google Earth)

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ULI Northwest Arkansas

ULI Northwest Arkansas is a district council of the Urban Land Institute, a global organization which for more than 80 years has been dedicated to improving the quality of urban areas. ULI is the sum of its members, who themselves deliver the ULI mission through programs and events and positively shape the future of real estate and land use disciplines throughout Northwest Arkansas. Members include real estate developers, builders, finance and equity professionals, architects, engineers, urban planners, elected officials, engaged citizens, and more. ULI shares best practices through practical professional development education programs and ULI's research and publications. The organization sets the standard for high quality information on urban planning, real estate development, growth and land use. Simply put, ULI Northwest Arkansas's goal is a built environment that better serves more people.

Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

Urban Land Institute harnesses its members' technical expertise to help communities solve complex land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. Technical assistance panels (TAPs) provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in the region. Drawing from its professional membership base, ULI Northwest Arkansas offers objective and responsible guidance on various land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The sponsoring organization is responsible for gathering the background information necessary to understand the project and present it to the panel. TAP panelists spend two days interviewing stakeholders, evaluating the challenges, and ultimately arriving at a set of recommendations that the sponsoring organization can use to guide development going forward.

Learn more at arkansas.uli.org.

About

Technical Assistance Panel

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Acknowledgments

ULI Northwest Arkansas would like to thank the City of Centerton, Arkansas, for inviting ULI to evaluate the opportunities for a downtown master plan that includes the city's historic downtown as well as undeveloped land to the south. ULI also thanks the City's professional staff and stakeholders who generously shared their time and experience with the panel throughout the course of its study.



The ULI technical assistance panel in front of the Centerton Municipal building.



Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction and Background	4
RFQ Recommendations for Old Town	9
New Town RFQ Recommendations	12
Water as an Asset in New Town and Old Town	16
Connectivity for New Town and Old Town	18
Identity and Placemaking in Centeron	20
Next Steps	22
About the Panel	24

Executive Summary

Centerton is one of the fastest growing communities in Arkansas. Founded as a rail station for farmers shipping produce, particularly apples, back east, Centerton was a small village with a small commercial center. This commercial center remains generally the same today, home to several charming historic buildings and few other uses, all situated in a floodplain that has and continues to limit additional growth.

Recently, landowners south of this Old Town city center have recognized an opportunity to build a New Town on approximately 400 acres of agricultural land. Loosely called New Town, landowners and City leaders are envisioning New Town to become the city's new downtown, allowing Old Town to remain true to its history and roots while opening up opportunities for a new denser urban environment, new commercial buildings, a range of housing options, and additional civic spaces.

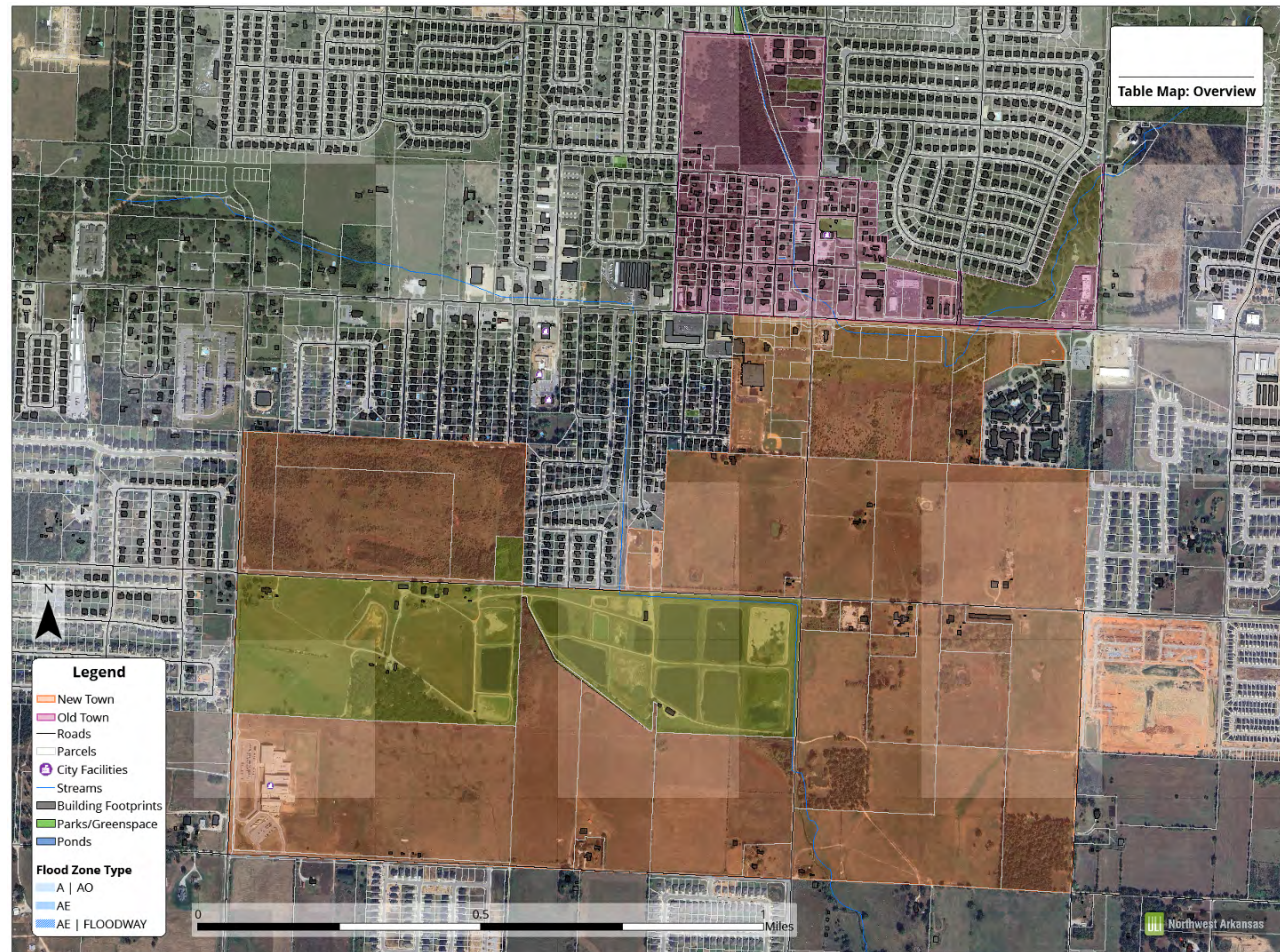
Turning to the Urban Land Institute Northwest Arkansas District Council (ULI), the City of Centerton (the City) asked ULI to convene a panel of real estate professionals to help determine where efforts should be focused to create a new downtown. ULI was also asked to outline elements of a request for qualifications (RFQ) that the City could use to identify a planning firm to assist it with crafting a new downtown master plan.

Addressing the first question posed by the City, the panel strongly recommends the

downtown geography include both Old Town and New Town. In so doing, however, it will need to recognize the development potential of each area as well as the practical limiting factors, particularly relating to Old Town. The following summary outlines the panel's recommendations for RFQ preparation.

Old Town RFQ Recommendations

The master planning focus for the city's Old Town district should support the revitalization and economic activity of Old Town. Challenges in Old Town, such as the presence of a significant floodplain and ownership of the roadway by the Arkansas Department



The study area includes Old Town, the historic downtown of Centerton north of Centerton Boulevard, and New Town, which is comprised of roughly 400 acres of undeveloped land to the south of Centerton Boulevard.

of Transportation (ARDOT) will require a practical approach that elevates pedestrian and bicyclist access and opportunities for public amenities.

Land use recommendations. The land use recommendations for the Old Town master plan should include the following elements. In some cases, the City may be able to act on these recommendations in the near term, outside of the master planning work.

- Permit additional uses in Old Town.
- Reduce parking minimums.
- Explore additional gathering spaces, including informal or “third places.”
- Preserve the floodway and floodplain.
- Staff economic development efforts.

Recommendations to calm traffic and support connectivity. The master plan should address calming traffic mechanisms and creating spaces where pedestrians are prioritized.

- Set clear parking regulations to reduce any additional impervious surfaces.
- Gain Main Street control from ARDOT.
- Enhance pedestrian and trail connectivity between Old Town and adjacent areas.
- Explore easement or acquisition opportunities to create a greenway and trail.

New Town RFQ Recommendations

The willingness of the landowners south of Centerton Boulevard to participate in a master planning process is exciting. Working

together, the following approach can help shape a New Town district and town center that serves the entire community.

Master Plan the New Town Center. The City should use the master plan to create a conceptual framework for New Town that is focused on a compact, mixed-use, walkable town center and surroundings. The master plan can be developed using the following process:

1. Engage the public to identify community goals.
2. Create a Vision Plan for a prototypical Town Center.
3. Reimagine connectivity between New Town and Old Town.
4. Use storytelling to define and shape the identity.

This town center planning work will create the foundation for future development that could be applied in more than one location, rather than site-specific rigid prescriptions, which allows the City and developers to provide the right solution in the right location when the landowners, their development partners, and the market realities align.

Create a regulatory toolkit for New Town town center development. A “mixed use town center” regulatory toolkit could include a palette of street and building types, lot configurations, a range of permitted and required uses, public space standards, and rules for block size and street connectivity.



Mayor Bill Edwards and the Centerton planning staff led the panel on a tour of the Old Town and New Town districts.

Create a Vision Plan and toolkit. The RFQ should address the experience needed to create a vision plan and development toolkit that enables residential, commercial, and civic uses across New Town.

Vibrant mix of uses. Finally, the design experience of the ideal master planning team will include demonstrated success creating a vibrant mix of commercial, residential, and civic uses, including a town center core, a mix of intensity and density, and a variety of housing options.

Water as an Asset

Centerton is the headwater of three of the region's most important creeks and rivers, including Little Sugar Creek, which becomes the Elk River, Little Osage Creek, which becomes the Illinois River, and Spavinaw Creek, which becomes the Neosho River. The presence of water in Centerton's downtown and its importance to the broader region should be celebrated in the resurgence of Old Town and in the development of New Town. The master planning team should demonstrate expertise elevating natural features, using regional stormwater

management as an opportunity for placemaking, using riparian overlays to help guide development along waterways, and have an understanding of similar overlays in order to identify best practices for Centerton.

Connectivity

Old Town and New Town are separated by Centerton Boulevard, an ARDOT state highway, and potentially a new Walmart Supercenter. Solutions to connectivity between the two districts and to the rest of Centerton will need to be addressed in the master plan. Specifically, the master plan should seek to improve the experience for those not in a car, create strong connections to Old Town, and create connectivity to surrounding areas.

Identity and Placemaking

These development opportunities also present the City of Centerton with an opportunity to strengthen its community brand and identity. Specifically, the master planning work can use urban design as placemaking to enhance the places that

residents and visitors associate with Centerton and use storytelling and identity planning to articulate Centerton's appeal to current and future residents as well as business owners and visitors.

Conclusion

The master planning process and the RFQ that will help identify the team to lead the work provides Centerton with an exciting opportunity to set a new or sharpened vision for what the community will be in the coming years and decades. Additionally, the master planning process will provide a town center vision plan and structured and adaptable mixed-use toolkit that the City can use to see that vision come to life across the built environment.

For a city that has grown organically and successfully over the years, Centerton is now ready to take a more direct and proactive approach to city building. The potential in Old Town and across the New Town site collectively provides once-in-a-generation opportunities to shape the future of this beloved city.

Introduction and Background

Centerton, Arkansas, a city of 20,000 people, is growing by leaps and bounds. With an eight percent growth rate and open land for development, residential developers are keeping the City of Centerton (the City) busy with development proposals and plan reviews. Understanding the growth trajectory before them, City of Centerton leadership is working hard to create a civic environment that honors Centerton's history while also positioning it to be a city of choice for current and future residents. The focal point of this civic environment is the city's downtown.

Downtown Centerton, directly north of the intersection of Main Street and Centerton Boulevard, is marked by quaint historic buildings, a spring that feeds a regional watershed, and open space that plays host to a number of community festivals. Downtown is also marked by a floodplain that limits future development.

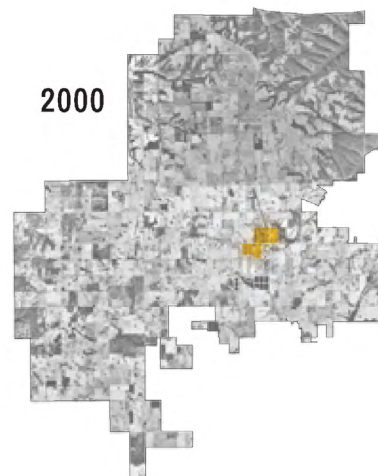
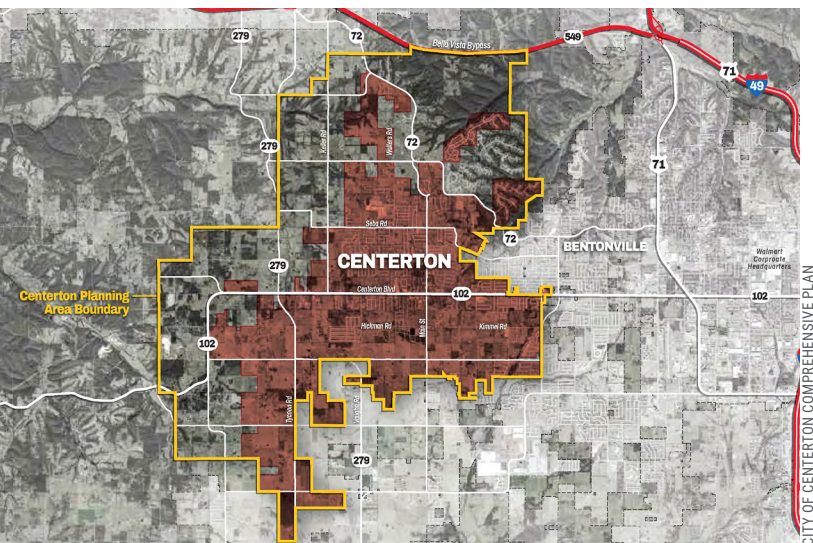
South of downtown and south of the intersection of Main Street and Centerton Boulevard, sits nearly 400 acres of undeveloped land. Held by three landowners, these 400 acres represent an exciting opportunity for Centerton to plan for and foster the development of a new downtown that complements the historic downtown and provides Centerton residents with the types of downtown amenities they are not able to find in the historic downtown district.

To plan for this combined downtown Centerton environment, City leaders turned to the Urban Land Institute Northwest Arkansas District Council (ULI) for assistance in identifying the key elements it should seek in a master plan for its downtown and guidance in crafting a request for qualifications (RFQ) for a firm to help put a master plan in place.

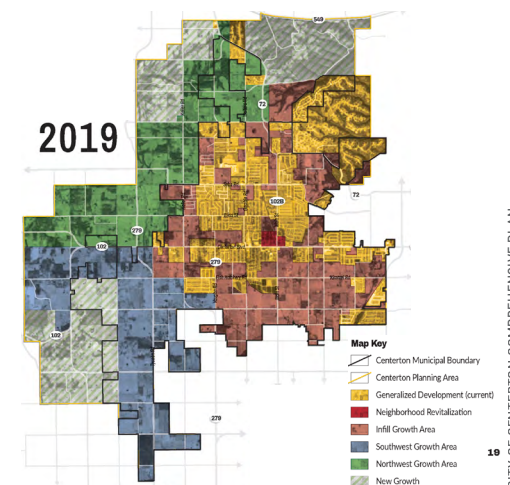
TAP Questions

1. In preparing a request for qualifications (RFQ) for a Downtown Centerton Master Plan, should the RFQ geography include both Old Town (north of Centerton Boulevard) as well as the approximately 400 acres of greenfield south of Centerton Boulevard?
2. How can an RFQ help the City shape the future of these downtown areas to support continued economic development, active transportation, and community connections (both cultural and physical)?

The TAP panel used these questions as its baseline for inquiry and discovery, and as the framework for its observations and recommendations.



Growth in Centerton can be seen in the yellow shaded areas. The City's comprehensive plan, adopted in 2020, notes other areas of potential city growth going forward.



ULI, using its trusted technical assistance panel (TAP) program, assembled a panel of real estate professionals with the expertise needed to evaluate the city's needs and make recommendations for the RFQ process. The panel represented the fields of development, urban design and planning, real estate brokerage, watershed management, and creative placemaking. The TAP process begins with a briefing from the City on current plans and developments in process, includes a tour of the study area—in this instance both the historic downtown and the greenfield sites—with City officials, and features interviews with key stakeholders to help provide a complete picture of the challenges before the City. Following these events, the panel considers what they heard, explores possible solutions, and ultimately delivers a set of recommendations the City can follow in its RFQ pursuit.

What the Panel Heard

Throughout the course of the stakeholder interviews, the panel heard the following key themes:

Centerton

- It is a fast-growing community with a history that is tied to agriculture (fruit) and its railroad station.
- Growth has recently been focused on new residential subdivisions and additional fast food establishments.

“

It's rare to have the City and the three property owners who represent 90% of the land in the area are committed to the same vision to create a new downtown.

—STAKEHOLDER

- North Main Street is a state highway and the City would like to gain control of the roadway.
- Dividing the two sites, Centerton Boulevard is also a state highway and serves as a very busy commuter route.
- Community events are popular and include a farmers market, movies-in-the-park events, the Centerton Day festival, Christmas with Santa events, and more.

Centerton's Old Town is home to several buildings in various stages of renovation, a few active businesses, a City park, and McCissic Spring. Main Street, a state roadway, bisects Old Town into east and west.



- There is a need for a large central gathering space beyond the City park in the city’s historic downtown (Old Town).
- The current zoning code is outdated and does not provide mechanisms for contemporary development, e.g. there is not a “mixed use” option.
- Limited sewer capacity and infrastructure issues are creating development delays.

Old Town

- McKissick Spring and McKissick Creek flow from and through the downtown area.
- Most of downtown is in a floodplain, which limits development to redevelopment only (i.e., new buildings outside of current building footprints are not allowed downtown)
- Existing structures in the core of downtown can be renovated but must meet strict Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) standards.
- Downtown buildings hold promise, but there are few of them and the historic building stock is even more limited.
- Existing landowners are committed to Old Town and are working hard to

(top) McCissik Springs is in Centerton’s Old Town. (middle and bottom) The panel toured Old Town and viewed the path that McCissic Creek takes through the city. The Old Town area is in a FEMA-designated floodplain.



renovate buildings and infuse life into the streetscape.

New Town

- Three primary landowners hold approximately 400 acres and are interested in working with the City on a plan for a “new, mixed-use downtown.”
- Land is undeveloped greenfields with few barriers to development.
- There is a high likelihood that a Walmart Supercenter will be built at the southeast corner of Main Street and Centerton Boulevard, between Old Town and the potential New Town district.
- The C.B. “Charlie” Craig State Hatchery is located south of Centerton Boulevard and adjacent to the 400 acres. The fish hatchery is a “good neighbor” and, with necessary safety precautions, could be a community recreational asset.
- The water flowing through these acres will need to be addressed, likely through some re-routing, detention ponds, etc.
- Residents and stakeholders would like to see walkable development at the site that is welcoming to and well-suited for a range of generations.
- East-west street connectivity will be important as the current roadways do not always connect through the site.

Although Centerton’s Old Town and New Town districts represent two very different development opportunities, the panel turned

its focus to the RFQ recommendations, evaluating how an RFQ can ask respondents to create a cohesive downtown district that leverages the unique characteristics and very different development opportunities of each. This focus on both Old Town and New Town can be constructed upon three foundational elements:

- Creating a vision for a new town center development in the New Town district
- Enabling restoration and removing barriers to development in Old Town
- Creating physical and visual connections north and south across Centerton Boulevard.

With this premise in hand, the panel turned its attention to the specific requirements the City should pursue in drafting its RFQ.



The New Town area, south of Centerton Boulevard, is undeveloped farm land and is held by three primary landowners.





RFQ Recommendations for Old Town

Built around the railroad stop and next to a natural spring, the city's Old Town neighborhood is a mix of historic charm and small town civic life. The goal of the Old Town portion of the master plan should be to support the revitalization of this part of the city and strengthen and facilitate additional economic activity. It will also be important for the master planning team to thoroughly assess the challenges to development in Old Town and provide the City with a practical approach to revitalization, including improved pedestrian and bike access and opportunities for public amenities.

Land Use Recommendations

The following recommendations should be included in the RFQ. At the same time, if the City has the capacity, some of these steps could be addressed in the near term, outside of the RFQ process.

Permit additional uses in Old Town. Due to its floodplain location, the built environment in the core of Old Town is at maximum capacity today with no other structures allowed. In an effort to best support the structures and activity in Old Town, the RFQ should address permitting a wider range of uses to encourage reuse of existing buildings on Main Street and create new opportunities on surrounding blocks.

Reduce parking minimums. The limited building and commercial activity in Old Town does not necessitate the City's current parking minimums. Reducing the requirement to 1 space for every 1,000 would be adequate for Old Town and could allow more businesses to fill the existing buildings and spaces instead of being limited by available parking.

Explore additional gathering spaces. Multiple stakeholders interviewed by the panel shared their enthusiasm for community events hosted in Old Town and other opportunities for gatherings, both large and small. By expanding the potential gathering spaces, beyond more formal street closures and Centerton City Park, the City can help foster

The Importance of Third Places

From The Brookings Institute: "'Third places' is a term coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg and refers to places where people spend time between home ('first' place) and work ('second' place).

They are locations where we exchange ideas, have a good time, and build relationships... the most effective ones for building real community seem to be physical places where people can easily and routinely connect with each other: churches, parks, recreation centers, hairdressers, and gyms. Third places have a number of important community building attributes. Depending on their location, social classes and backgrounds can be 'leveled-out' in ways that are unfortunately rare these days, with people feeling they are treated as social equals.

Informal conversation is the main activity and most important linking function. One commentator refers to third places as the 'living room' of society."



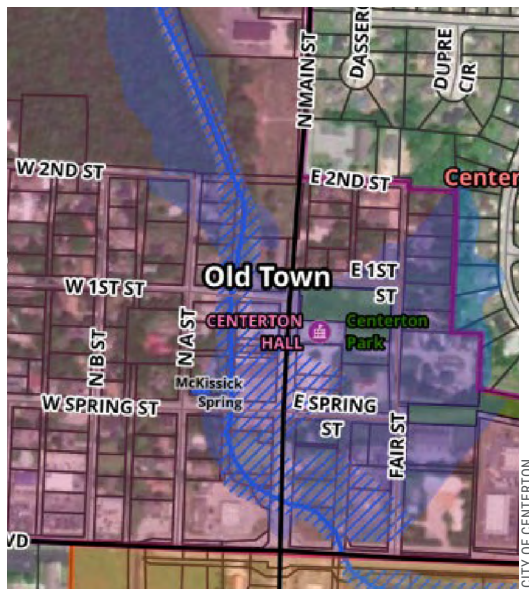
Old Town Centerton, on the left, as depicted in an early map of the city. On the right, an aerial photo shows how the area has been modified to better accommodate the waterway that flows through it.

“third places” that allow the public to meet, mingle, and enjoy one another in more community-focused areas.

Preserve the floodway and floodplain.

Centerton got its name from the railroad stop, yet it could just as easily have earned it from its place in the center of important regional watersheds. The panel strongly encourages the City to leave the floodway in place and not to move it underground. Water is an important asset to the community and can become an amenity instead of a problem to manage around.

Staff economic development efforts. The City is also encouraged to consider adding an economic development director position to City staff. With a role focused completely on supporting and building the economic vitality of the city and expanding the types of



Most of Old Town is in a floodplain, noted here by the blue lines.

businesses found across the city, including Old Town and other areas, the commercial vitality and mix of businesses can flourish beyond its current roster of fast food restaurants.

Recommendations to Calm Traffic and Support Connectivity

Movement to and through Old Town centers around vehicular traffic today, with all other uses filtering around the roadway. The RFQ should focus on creating better connectivity to and through Old Town for all modes of transportation by calming traffic and creating spaces where pedestrians, not cars, are prioritized.

Reduce or remove parking minimums.

Again the panel stressed the need to address the City’s parking requirements. Adopting a shared parking approach, wherein businesses agree to share spaces instead of creating more, can create a more walkable environment and promote pedestrian safety.

Set clear parking regulations. Additionally, the City is encouraged to set clear parking regulations across Old Town that will both support the reuse and renovation of existing buildings and reduce the need to add more impervious surface to an already flood-challenged environment.

Gain Main Street control. As a State-controlled roadway, North Main Street is designed and maintained to facilitate the easy and frictionless movement of cars through the area, which poses challenges to a city wishing to create a walkable, pedestrian oriented downtown. By gaining control of Main Street from the Arkansas

Department of Transportation (ARDOT), the City can reshape the roadway in a manner that supports downtown businesses and promotes pedestrian safety and movement. Any roadway improvements to North Main Street, be that City- or ARDOT-led, should be delayed until the City gains control to ensure that the measures support the City’s Old Town revitalization plans.

Once control of North Main Street shifts to the City, it is encouraged to pursue the following measures:

- **Calm traffic.** Use traffic calming measures to promote walkability.
- **Create clear on-street parking.** In addition to supporting business activity in Old Town, on-street parking along North Main Street will create a narrower roadway and encourage drivers to slow down as they pass through.

Enhance connectivity to Old Town. The neighborhood surrounding Old Town should have easy pedestrian and bicyclist access to the city center. Building or improving sidewalks and trails can help people move around town without having to get in a car and drive, which also reduces the need for additional parking in Old Town.

Explore easement or acquisition opportunities. Connecting the city’s beloved assets—Brinwood Park, McKissick Springs Station Park, and Old Town—could be facilitated by a greenway and trail connections. The City is encouraged to explore potential easement arrangements or even acquisition opportunities with surrounding property owners who may find the idea of interest.



New Town RFQ Recommendations

The opportunities before the City at the New Town site are exciting. The willingness of the landowners to participate in a master planning process and their interest in pursuing a vision that serves the broader community is compelling. Working together, with a new master plan in hand, the City, the landowners, and their development partners should be able to deliver the community amenities, housing, and economic development opportunities one might expect from a city the size of Centerton.

Master Plan for a New Town Center

Although the City is not in a position to propose a specific regulating plan for the New Town area that would dictate specific locations of uses or site-specific designations, the RFQ process provides the City with an opportunity to create a conceptual framework for New Town that is

focused on a compact, mixed-use, walkable town center and surroundings. To get to that framework, however, the City will need to take several important steps.

- 1. Engage the public.** Master planning cannot happen in a vacuum and community goals should not be dictated. The community should be invited into the process, early and often, to share their goals and to help the City arrive at a collective vision that current residents find energizing and authentic and that future residents will find attractive and compelling.
- 2. Create a Vision Plan for a prototypical Town Center.** Not meant to be prescriptive, a Vision Plan can help identify key elements that the community and City would like to see in a new Town Center. This process should include:
 - Defining the key components, the scale of buildings (generally) and public space, and the context for uses within broad areas.
 - Setting minimum standards for pedestrian and vehicular connections inside the master plan and beyond, ensuring that connections to the surrounding neighborhoods are easily accessible and promote the walkability and transportation goals of New Town.
 - Exploring a range of uses, including retail, commercial, employment, civic, and residential. These uses can stand alone in a building or be mixed to create mixed-use spaces that are active throughout the day and into the evening.
 - Illustrating potential open space types to help the community



Commercial areas, topped by second-floor offices or residential spaces, can be found along town center streets.



Outdoor dining and other sidewalk activity can bring the city center streets alive throughout the day and evening.



Civic spaces become welcome gathering locations for community events, programming, and spontaneous activity.

envision how they might like to enjoy the public spaces—alone, with family, in groups, in active recreation or relaxation, in spontaneous or planned activity spaces and more.

- Incorporating the natural topography and watershed as amenity and stormwater infrastructure. Too often water is pushed into heavily managed spaces and either channeled underground or fenced off. Designed thoughtfully, water can move through an area and facilitate stormwater management while creating a welcoming and more natural environment that can be enjoyed and explored safely.
- Exploring optional locations for the Center of New Town. The master planning process may need to consider several options for a Town Center, depending upon landowner and developer interests, motivations, and timing.

3. Reimagine connectivity between New Town and Old Town. Although they are important community assets, Centerton Boulevard and the proposed Walmart Supercenter create significant barriers between Old Town and New Town. Connection points between the two, likely in several areas to facilitate better and broader community connectivity, will need to be creatively and practically envisioned through the master planning process.

4. Use storytelling to define and shape the identity. The city of Centerton is full of residents who are passionate about their community and have great pride in their city. It will be important that a master plan helps harness that community enthusiasm into an authentic story and engaging narrative that can help shape Centerton's identity into the future.

Regulatory Toolkit for New Town Center Development

The City's RFQ should attract professionals who can draft standards or a toolkit for a new, mixed-use town center district based on the vision for New Town. A "mixed use town center" regulatory toolkit could include a palette of street and building types, lot configurations, a range of permitted and required uses, public space standards, and rules for block size and street connectivity.

A new town center district (new base zoning or an overlay) should define minimum required and permitted components, including a main street-style retail environment, a range of housing options, defined public spaces, employment opportunities, potential civic uses, and stormwater management infrastructure as amenity. The toolkit extends beyond typical land use regulations and addresses the following elements for the entire master planned area:

- **Building types and frontages**, including residential and commercial buildings as well as mixed-use buildings.



This town center in Alpharetta, Georgia, features a mix of residential and commercial uses along walkable urban streets. A large green space provides opportunities for community gathering and recreation.

- **Street and block layout standards** to supplement and connect the existing roadways and create connections between existing and new streets.
- **Public space requirements** and standards. Successful and vibrant town centers feature public spaces that are plentiful and welcoming to all.
- **Housing type parameters** that embrace a variety of sizes, building types, and price points.
- **Minimum town center components** established in the broader Vision Plan through the early community engagement.
- **Location options for a town center** that can respond to the market, landowner intentions, and developer interest.

The concept plan and toolkit create a framework that allows flexibility for the private landowners to create their own master plans for future mixed-use development but ensures implementation of the community's vision for a new pedestrian-oriented town center with public spaces and an interconnected street network.

Vision Plan and Toolkit, Foundational Experience

The RFQ should address the experience needed to create a master plan and development framework or toolkit that enables residential, commercial, and civic uses across New Town. To accomplish this, the RFQ should ask respondents to address the following elements:

- **Interdisciplinary design and planning team** who can expertly address the wide variety of land uses and goals for this large area.
- **Previous work with cities similarly situated** in size, in a rapidly-urbanizing area, and moving away from bedroom community roots toward a more robust mix of uses.
- **Working with municipalities, the public, and private landowners**, including large landowners and multiple landowners.
- **Utility and infrastructure master planning.**

- **Working with state departments of transportation.**
- **Addressing water management**, including stormwater management and embracing watershed protection and amenitization.

Vibrant Mix of Uses, Design Experience

The design experience of the ideal master planning team will include demonstrated success creating a vibrant mix of commercial, residential, and civic uses.

- **Town center core.** The “Main Street” environment should feature a mix of civic, retail, commercial, and residential spaces and a vertical and horizontal mix of uses within buildings (commercial and retail topped by residential or office) and within walkable proximity.

- **Mix of intensity and density.** A town center will feature more intense uses clustered at the center (higher density) and transition around edges to less intense, lower density uses.
- **Housing options** should include a range of higher density (e.g., four- to six-story multifamily) buildings to lower density missing middle homes such as townhouses, duplexes, and fourplexes. Community stakeholders also noted a strong desire for housing that will be appropriate and attractive across generations, helping ensure that community members can remain in Centerton as they age and housing needs change.





Water as an Asset

in New Town and Old Town

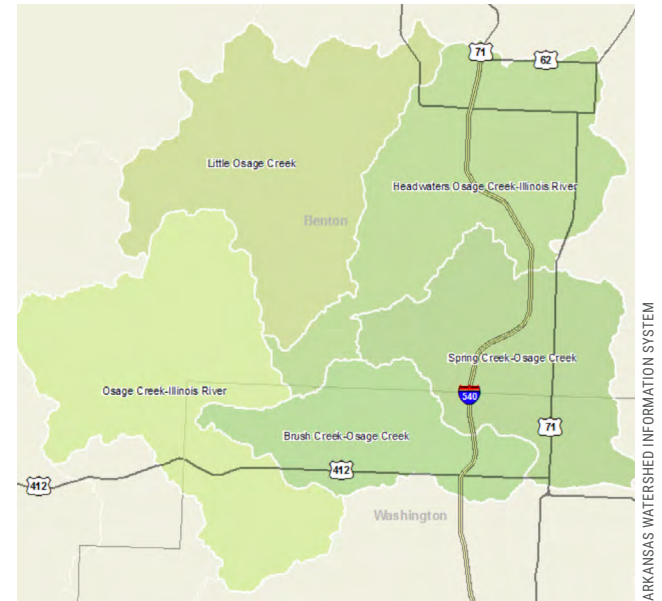
Centerton is the headwater of three regional watersheds in northwest Arkansas. The presence of water in Centerton's downtown, at the spring and along the creek, is a factor to be celebrated in the resurgence of Old Town and in the development of New Town. It is also an important factor to consider in the development of stormwater management infrastructure alongside new development.

Through the RFQ process, the City should seek professionals who will embrace water as a civic amenity and community asset in its master planning activities. The following areas of expertise should be incorporated into the RFQ:

- Embrace and elevate natural features, including using the natural watershed as

a community asset and water amenity and establishing greenways to assist with water management, retention, and recreation.

- Use regional stormwater management as an opportunity for placemaking and elevating the importance of water to the history and the future of Centerton.
- Demonstrate experience with riparian overlays to help guide development along waterways, and provide community access to the water while also protecting the water quality and water table.
- Understand overlays that other municipalities in the area are using, learn from these activities and align with and elevate best practices in Centerton.



Downtown Centerton is the starting points for three of the region's most important creeks and rivers, including Little Sugar Creek (Elk River), Little Osage Creek (Illinois River), and Spavinaw Creek (Neosho River).



MARY MADDEN



MARY MADDEN

Located in Tulsa, Oklahoma, this former parking lot was transformed into a stormwater management basin. In addition to managing water from runoff at the surrounding buildings and parking structures, this water retention area creates an inviting recreational space and encourages visitors to walk alongside and get close to the water and surrounding native vegetation.

Riparian Overlay

Cities use riparian overlays to provide additional protections for stream corridors and water quality by guiding, and at times limiting, the types of uses and materials that can fall within the overlay footprint. The overlay creates a creek buffer, typically by designating the distance from the creekbank that structures can be built, and often addressing neighboring building heights and setbacks for new construction. Building design standards and landscaping standards are also often included in riparian overlays.

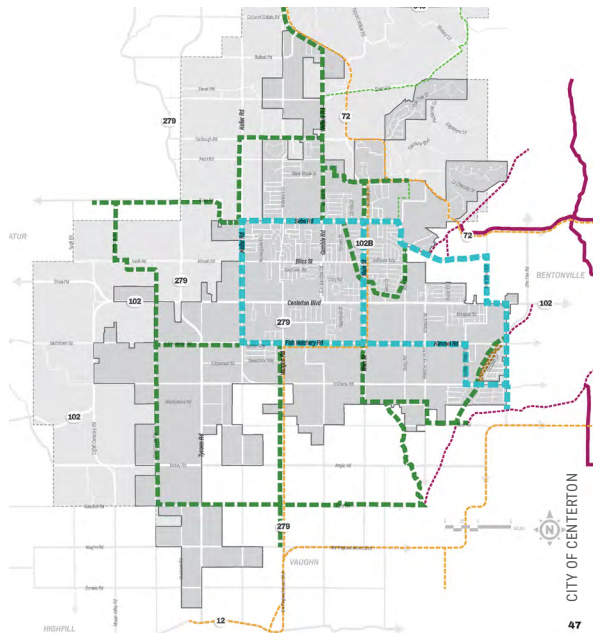


Connectivity

for New Town and Old Town

Creating connectivity between Old Town and New Town presents several unique challenges for a cohesive master plan. The two districts are separated by Centerton Boulevard, an ARDOT-managed state highway and busy commuter thoroughfare. The anticipated Walmart Supercenter, south and east of the intersection of Main Street and Centerton Boulevard, will also create separation and challenge connectivity goals on the east side of Main Street. Finally, waterway connectivity is also a consideration as McCissick Creek flows from Old Town to the southeast, under Centerton Boulevard and through the future Walmart parcel.

Solutions to connectivity, between the two districts and to the rest of Centerton more broadly, will need to be addressed in the



The City's trail network is designed to connect users across Centerton and to other networks beyond the city limits.

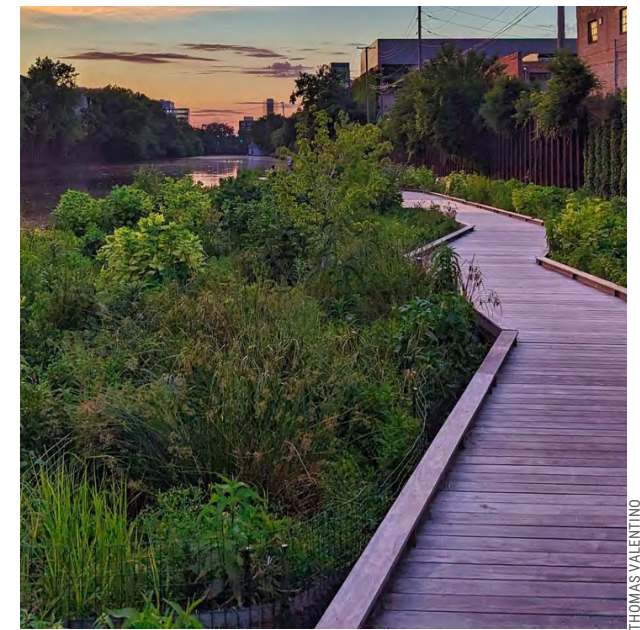
master planning process and the RFQ should seek expertise to guide urban district and trail connectivity. The following factors should be highlighted in the RFQ:

- **Improve the experience for those not in a car.** As two ARDOT roadways cross through the area, and the State department's goal is efficient vehicular movement, the downtown master plan must pay particular attention to the experience, safety, and accessibility of those moving around the entire downtown area on foot, on bikes, pushing strollers, using wheelchairs, and more. Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB), enhanced crossings, and signage improvements may be a good start for better connecting key areas.



The R3 network provides excellent opportunities to connect people to trails, nature, and the region's agricultural economy.

- **Create strong connections to Old Town.** The mass of potential development south of Centerton Blvd pedestrian could become insular. Creating connections to the rest of the city, and particularly north across Centerton Boulevard, will be critical. Creating safe pedestrian crossings, allowing residents and visitors to leave their cars behind, should be paramount.
- **Create connectivity to surrounding areas.** Downtown is for everyone. The new development should be porous, with highly visible and accessible connections to the surrounding neighborhoods, trail network, schools, and retail amenities.



This boardwalk provides an inviting and safe way to get close to the water while still protecting the water quality by limiting human interaction, which is a concern of fish hatchery leadership.



Identity and Placemaking in Centerton

The development potential of the New Town acreage and the rejuvenation of Old Town pose a unique opportunity for the City of Centerton to sharpen or strengthen its community brand and identity—or shift to a new one if the community believes it is ready for one. The RFQ should also ask respondents for information and experience regarding their ability to leverage this unique storytelling and civic identity creation or curation moment.

Specifically, the City should ask firms to respond with information regarding the following services:

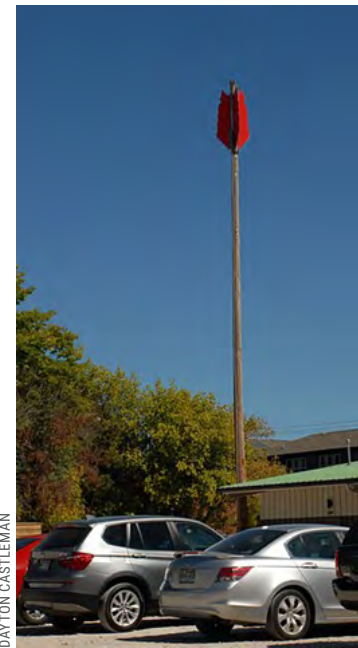
- **Using urban design as placemaking.** Used effectively, urban design helps shape a sense of place, a recognizable

space that is authentic to the area and sub-areas and built on an urban fabric that is cohesive and connected.

- **Shaping storytelling and identity planning.** Centerton has a rich history and an opportunity to shape its story into a narrative that is authentic to the city’s roots, its present condition, and what it wants to be—or be known for—well into the future. These can become the stories of Centerton that community members share with family and friends, that civic leaders share with businesses considering locating in Centerton, and that City staff share across departments to help align City services around the community’s vision.

Placemaking

Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution. From [Project for Public Spaces](#).



Placemaking takes a variety of forms. In these examples, monumentation, both above the street and at the sidewalk, signify that one is entering a specific, special space. On the right, an artistic arrow installation and a painted sidewalk, respectively, point visitors to locations of interest in a fun and effective manner.

Next Steps

As the City prepares to issue a request for qualifications for a downtown master plan, the City of Centerton can begin to lay the ground work for the community engagement, land use modifications, and potential development on the horizon.

While the RFQ should include elements that help define New Town and refine and support Old Town, there are several steps the City can take in the meantime to facilitate the continued revitalization of Old Town even before the master planning team is selected. One of these steps, shifting control of North Main Street away from ARDOT and to the City of Centerton, will take time and conversations; therefore, this should begin sooner rather than later.

Within the master planning process, the first step will be to develop a vision plan, mixed-use toolkit, and regulatory framework for the new town center. The City and its partners will next need to identify concrete, actionable steps the City can take to revitalize Old Town and also explore ways to improve connectivity and pedestrian-friendly enhancements across Centerton Boulevard.

With professional planning staff and strong elected leadership, the City is well-positioned to embrace the exciting development opportunities on the horizon, particularly in the New Town area. With careful planning, thoughtful community engagement, and the right master planning partner, the City will be well on its way to developing a downtown befitting one of the fastest growing cities in northwest Arkansas.





About the Panel



Mary Madden
Panel Chair
Madden Planning LLC

Mary Madden has more than 25 years of experience in the fields of urban planning and

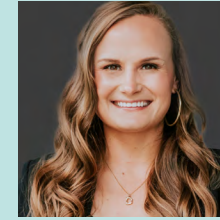
design, community development, and historic preservation at the federal, state, and local levels. Her practice includes planning and urban design for public and private sector clients, with an emphasis on revising zoning codes to promote smart growth, sustainability and New Urbanism. She has worked in communities ranging from aging mill towns to mid-sized cities; from vibrant college towns to booming suburbs. In addition to working directly with communities, Mary frequently speaks and writes on the topics of urban design and form-based codes. She is currently an active participant in CNU's Project for Code Reform. Before beginning solo-practice, Mary was a firm principal of Washington DC-based Ferrell Madden for almost 20 years. She also served for almost a decade in several positions at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Earlier in her career, she worked for the Mayors' Institute on City Design and at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Mary holds a Master of Urban and Environmental Planning degree from the University of Virginia and a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from Princeton University. She was a founding board member of the Form-Based Codes Institute (now a program of Smart Growth America).



Dayton Castleman
Verdant Studio

Dayton Castleman is an artist, curator, educator, and administrator based in northwest Arkansas.

His multi-modal studio practice spans sculpture, painting, photography, and performance, and undergirds his role as Director of Creative Placemaking at Verdant Studio, a woman-founded and owned architecture firm based in Rogers, AR. Born and raised in New Orleans, he has lived and worked in Jackson, Miss., Houston, Philadelphia, and Chicago. His artwork has been included in museum and gallery exhibitions throughout the United States and in Europe. His research has focused on artwork in architectural and public spaces for the past 18 years, and his research interests include art ecosystem development, visual perception theory, and religion in art. He holds a BA in Art with a painting concentration from Belhaven University, and an MFA in Sculpture from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He lives with his wife Karen and their children Anna, Zoe, and Fletcher in downtown Rogers, Arkansas.



Oksana Demaris
Focus Commercial
Real Estate

As a founding member of Focus Commercial Real Estate, Oksana

DeMaris serves as a Brokerage Associate, recognized for her dynamic and results-driven approach. She takes on multiple roles within the firm and is committed to providing exceptional service to her clients. Oksana holds a pivotal role within both the brokerage and acquisition teams, specializing in agency leasing, tenant representation, and identifying strategic investment opportunities for the firm and its clients. Her responsibilities encompass conducting in-depth market research and analysis of trends in Northwest Arkansas, as well as executing lease transactions on behalf of landlords and tenants. A Northwest Arkansas native, Oksana earned a Bachelor of Science in Finance with a minor in Real Estate from the University of Arkansas. She began her career at Colliers International as an intern during her junior year, later transitioning into a full-time role as a brokerage associate. With a strong commitment to excellence in the commercial real estate industry, she has collaborated with prominent brands such as Scotts and Kiss Nails. Recognized for her expertise and dedication, Oksana has built a strong professional reputation, making her a valued member of the Focus Commercial Real Estate team. Oksana is actively involved in the Northwest Arkansas Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM) Chapter and currently serves as its 2025 President. She

earned her CCIM Designation in 2022 after completing the rigorous coursework and continues to be a leader in the industry. Additionally, Oksana is a proud member of the Leadership Benton County Class of 2025, further demonstrating her commitment to professional and community leadership. She is recognized by her colleagues as a driven and strategic professional, known for her ability to foster strong relationships while combining a personable approach with a deep understanding of the industry.



Ryan Faust
BUF Studio

Ryan is a Founding Partner and the Managing Principal of BUF Studio. He is

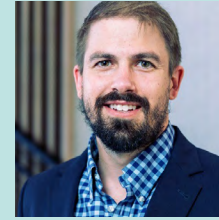
involved in overall company strategic growth initiatives ensuring the BUF Studio team delivers on the company vision. He focuses on team building, employee engagement, growth and leadership, and cross-office collaboration instilling the three core values of the company across the entire organization. He is also involved in critical project moments, ensuring that employees and clients are fully supported for the success of their projects.



Leif Kindberg
Illinois River Watershed Partnership

Leif Kindberg is the Executive Director of the Illinois River Watershed Partnership (IRWP)

where he works with a great team to implement voluntary conservation work in partnership with landowners, businesses, municipalities, and others to promote and improve water quality of the Illinois River, economic development, and quality of life in the watershed. Prior to joining IRWP, Leif worked with Tetra Tech Inc, a leading provider of water consulting and engineering services. Most recently he lived in Tanzania and co-led an integrated water resources management program in two of the country's largest river basins to improve health, water resources management, natural resources conservation, and better use of hydrological data. Leif has a BA in Political Science from California State University Long Beach and an MBA from the George Washington University. He grew up on a small farm in the Buffalo River watershed.



Matthew Loos
Olsson Inc.

Matthew Loos is Vice President of Civil Engineering at Olsson. Matt has worked in the civil engineering

field and commercial real estate development since 2012. His projects include multi-family residential, retail, campus, and office developments in Texas and Arkansas. Matt is an experienced project manager and civil engineer with particular expertise in land development, AutoCAD Civil 3D, and project estimation. Matt graduated from the University of Arkansas with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering with a minor in General Business.