



WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL ON
STRONG CITIES, STRONG COMMUNITIES

MACON-BIBB COUNTY, GEORGIA

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Strong Cities, Strong Communities Initiative (SC2)

was an innovative approach for supporting cities experiencing population and job loss, persistent poverty, capacity constraints, and similar challenges in an era of dwindling resources. Each SC2 city shared a common narrative: despite having faced tremendous economic and demographic challenges for the last few decades, local leaders and stakeholders have a strong vision for change and seek a better federal partner.

Under SC2, communities including the consolidated government of Macon-Bibb County, GA, received intensive technical assistance from federal interagency Community Solutions Teams that work in city hall to support the city's vision for economic development.

Through a cooperative partnership of federal, state, regional and local partners, community leaders and local residents, Macon-Bibb County and SC2 were able to make progress on each of the three identified goals.

MAJOR SC2 ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN MACON-BIBB COUNTY

- Supporting the revitalization of downtown Macon and historic neighborhoods
- Expanding regional transportation connectivity to boost economic competitiveness
- Investing in people to reduce poverty and crime

SUPPORTING THE REVITALIZATION OF DOWNTOWN MACON AND HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOODS

Promoting Infill Development

To further the mayor's goals for infill development, the SC2 team identified Federal and philanthropic partners to fund a series of Smart Growth workshops on downtown revitalization. With technical assistance from SC2, Macon-Bibb was one of 14 jurisdictions selected for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Smart Growth Building Blocks program. The SC2 team braided together the EPA *Smart Growth 101* workshop with a Knight Foundation-funded *Smart Growth 102: Downtown Revitalization* workshop for U.S. local elected officials. Complementing these efforts, SC2 worked with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to realign federal funds to enable a fiscal impact study on geographic dispersion of municipal costs and revenues. The workshops and fiscal impact study made a data-driven case for increased infill development, demonstrated quadruple returns on investments in the downtown area, and provided local officials with strategies for action.

Strategic Brownfield Remediation

In recent years, Macon-Bibb County has worked to redevelop downtown buildings with loft/condo housing and refocus business on entertainment, food, and retail development. Several requests to redevelop parcels have not moved forward due to questions about land contamination issues. With SC2's assistance, Macon-Bibb County secured a \$400,000 EPA Brownfield Assessment grant to address blighted areas across the county. This included a prime industrial corridor adjacent to downtown. If a brownfield assessment finds contamination, the consolidated government can apply for further brownfield cleanup grants from the EPA.

The brownfield assessments will create certainty about site conditions for developers interested in investing in the burgeoning downtown, which a key goal of the 2015 Macon Action Plan. Macon-Bibb County plans to pursue these opportunities once the brownfields assessment effort is complete.

In addition to the brownfields assessment work, the SC2 team facilitated new collaboration between EPA and Macon-Bibb County officials to address the cleanup of known hazardous sites. SC2 organized a meeting in Atlanta between the EPA and the Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority (MBCIA), which owns and operates an industrial park on EPA's list of Superfund sites, which have significant land contamination issues. By connecting MBCIA with EPA, the SC2 team enabled MBCIA to align its master plan for the industrial park with EPA's work in the area.

Identifying a Downtown Transit Mode

SC2 provided guidance to Macon-Bibb County as it developed a comprehensive public transit strategy. Through SC2, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) provided technical assistance to the mayor's team to create a transit line through downtown Macon's Second Street Corridor Project. As a connector between East Macon and downtown, the Second Street Corridor would link residential areas like the Mill Hill neighborhood with businesses and anchor institutions like universities, hospitals, and government facilities.

The SC2 team facilitated a peer-learning tour of the City of Tallahassee's electric bus system and multiple demonstrations of electric bus options in downtown to inform Macon-Bibb County officials of the merits of electric buses as a transit option, in terms of cost savings and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Macon has since selected the electric bus as the preferred alternative for the Second Street Corridor. The electric bus system will serve as the backbone to the larger regional transit system.

The consolidated government and the Macon Transit Authority are pursuing funding from DOT's TIGER program and the Federal Transit Administration's Low or No Emission Vehicle Deployment Program grants to

fund the electric buses and charging systems for the Second Street Corridor. After one grant application proved unsuccessful, SC2 organized technical assistance to help them prepare stronger requests in the future.

Encouraging Strategic, Innovative Solutions to Neighborhood Revitalization

SC2 guided Macon-Bibb County in the creation of a county-wide Blight Task Force and helped strengthen relationships between consolidated government leadership and community-based organizations working on blight elimination. After the task force identified blighted properties, the county approved a bond resolution of up to \$10 million for blight remediation. Building on these efforts, the Knight Foundation funded a peer-learning trip for county officials to meet with city officials, the Genessee County Land Bank, and the Center for Community Progress in Flint, MI, another SC2 city.

In the Fort Hawkins neighborhood, “the Birthplace of Macon,” SC2 collaborated with the Macon Arts Alliance to support their nascent idea to develop an arts village as an adaptive reuse strategy for the neighborhood to catalyze economic opportunity. Recognizing the merits of this approach, SC2 provided technical assistance to the Macon Arts Alliance to strengthen the case for cross-sector collaboration around this concept. The SC2 team worked with the U.S. EPA’s Office of Sustainable Communities to secure \$40,000 for the Arts Alliance to host a sustainable design and inclusive community visioning workshop for a new arts village project in Mill Hill.

To leverage this work and further local priorities, SC2 and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) provided capacity-building activities to the Arts Alliance on place-making programs and helped the Arts Alliance secure a \$134,000 NEA Our Town grant in July 2015, after unsuccessful attempts in the past. This grant will be used to launch an artist residency program, develop a neighborhood and cultural district plan for the “Mill Hill: East Macon Arts Village,” and implement ideas from the EPA-funded equitable development workshop. The Knight Foundation

provided matching funds to complement the Our Town grant and promote resident engagement during the planning process and provided initial funding to establish a community land trust for the area to maintain affordability and preserve public space.

Part of the Mill Hill Initiative entails the rehabilitation of the former Bibb Mill Auditorium, which will become the Mill Hill Community Arts Center. In 2016, several County Commissioners compiled their budgets for blight elimination to support the redevelopment of Mill Hill. SC2 connected Macon-Bibb County with blight bond funding, which the county has since combined with local philanthropic funds to fund the construction project. The Macon Arts Alliance plans to convert part of the auditorium into a community kitchen and the site of a culinary training program run by the local Goodwill.

EXPANDING REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIVITY TO BOOST ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Inland Port and Freight Logistics Hub

A U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) decision affected the Middle Georgia region in 2012. To mitigate the economic impacts from that decision, DOD’s Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) worked with the Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC) on a feasibility study for an inland port and freight logistics hub that will take advantage of Macon-Bibb County’s strategic location at the junction of three interstate highways and half way between the Port of Savannah, the fourth largest U.S. port in containers, and Atlanta, the largest regional business hub in the Southeast. Macon is also next to Warner Robins Air Force Base, an Air Logistics Center for the Air Force and Georgia’s largest industrial installation. Because the initial study found that the

area could support an inland port or logistics hub and provided local authorities with guidelines on working with businesses to establish one, DOD-OEA is working with MGRC to support a Phase II study that will build upon the recommendations of the initial feasibility study. The SC2 team connected OEA's work on the inland port, which started just as the SC2 team arrived on the ground in Macon, to other key transportation and economic development priorities.

Middle Georgia Regional Airport

In 2014, Macon-Bibb County lost its last passenger service airline and was subsequently put on the list for removal of the federal Essential Air Service (EAS) subsidy from the FAA, which is critical for small regional airports to incentivize passenger service. SC2 worked with airport leadership, DOT, and FAA to ensure continued Essential Air Service subsidies for the county, allowing it time to find an airline that can provide long-term service for the region. In January 2017, DOT entered in to a grant agreement with Macon-Bibb County to provide up to \$4.6 million for public charter air service to Washington, D.C., using 30-seat Jetstream 41 aircraft.

SC2 also provided technical assistance to Macon-Bibb County in developing the Airport Master Plan and studies for a runway extension that would be able to accommodate larger aircraft and attract more businesses as a result. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) approved a runway extension justification report and Macon-Bibb is preparing a cost/benefit analysis and an environmental study for the extension, which will attract aviation companies that supply high-wage jobs to the county. HAECO America and Yulista Aviation are expanding or moving their operations to the Middle Georgia Regional Airport.

Passenger Rail

To advance consolidated government's desire for passenger rail service between Macon-Bibb County and Atlanta, SC2 facilitated and supported discussions about the development of passenger rail with regional and statewide transportation stakeholders, including the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Georgia DOT, the Georgia Municipal Association, and the counties and cities located between Macon and

Atlanta. Further, SC2 team members identified potential funding sources for passenger rail service from the Federal Transit Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing program. These efforts resulted in the first ever Intercity Passenger Rail Summit on July 30, 2015. While the idea of a rail connection between Macon and Atlanta had been broached before, the summit was the first time all the cities and counties between Macon and Atlanta convened at the same table to discuss the possibility of intercity passenger rail. SC2 also uncovered old, unused Congressional Earmarks for Macon and has facilitated discussions between Macon-Bibb County, GDOT and FHWA to guide their use for the existing transportation needs of Macon-Bibb County.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE TO REDUCE POVERTY AND CRIME

Operation HOPE

SC2 coordinated a partnership between Macon-Bibb County and Operation HOPE, a non-profit that works to build thriving business communities in struggling areas through financial literacy, access to capital, and mentorship. With SC2's assistance, a delegation of 10 representatives from Macon-Bibb County attended the HOPE Global Forum. SC2 worked with Operation HOPE, a financial literacy group, and the county to bring them to Macon. Building on the SC2 team and local officials' efforts, Operation HOPE opened a "HOPE Inside Macon-Bibb" Center in the Buck Melton Center Community Center in May 2016. Center staff work with low-income, unbanked people to build their personal financial management capacity and help them build and maintain a credit score of 700 or better.

Summer Feeding Programs

SC2 facilitated a partnership among Macon-Bibb County, the Georgia State Director for 2 USDA Food Programs, Navicent Hospital, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service about expanding the number of locations that children can

access free, healthy meals (called “summer feeding locations”) in the county. All school-aged children in the county qualify for summer food assistance but only 25% of eligible children participated. As a direct result of these efforts, Navicent Hospital agreed to establish summer feeding locations through the hospital, in three affiliated urgent care centers, and in four of their associated clinics in the county. This collaborative relationship with USDA will empower county officials to strategically add or change shift sites in the future as needed.

Improving the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

The Small Business Administration (SBA) formed an alliance with Macon-Bibb’s newly formed Office of Small Business Affairs (OSBA) to conduct joint technical assistance to businesses in the area. SBA and Macon-Bibb County’s OSBA have signed a Memorandum of Understanding for their collaborative efforts. This partnership enabled the new OSBA to convene a business summit in May 2015 which attracted 115 participants and a woman-owned business summit in September 2015.

ConnectHome

On February 12, 2016, HUD launched the ConnectHome Initiative in Macon-Bibb County to increase broadband access in HUD-assisted housing. As a result of this partnership between HUD, Macon-Bibb County, the Bibb County Housing Authority and Cox Communications, Cox Communications is providing \$9.95 internet connections to qualifying families with school-aged children, and AT&T has also followed suit with \$10 per month service. In addition, 465 tablets and 56 computers have been distributed in the county by EveryoneOn, a national partnership implementer for ConnectHome.

Decreasing Juvenile Crime Rates

The SC2 team identified the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Office of Justice Programs (OJP) as a potential resource to support the Mayor’s goal to decrease juvenile crime rates in the county. SC2 assisted the Macon-Bibb County Sheriff’s Office in submitting a successful application for an assessment from the

OJP’s Diagnostic Center. Following a nine-month engagement in Macon-Bibb County, the Diagnostic Center identified a number of preventive measures that the county could take to prevent juvenile interactions with the justice system. The Diagnostic Center found that the county already had several programs that could intervene in these key points and is providing assistance to the county to increase the impact of these programs.