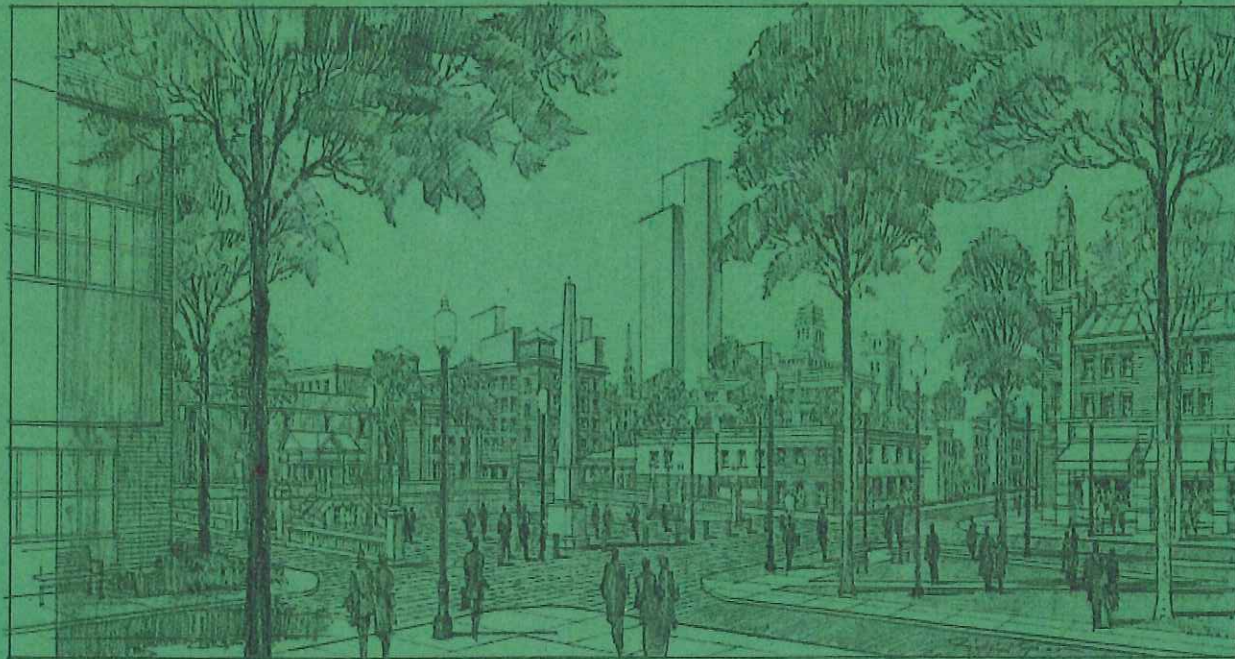


Capital South Plan: *SEGway to the Future*

Albany, NY



July 2007

Prepared for:

The City of Albany

and the

South End Action Committee

Prepared by:

Phillips Preiss Shapiro Associates, Inc.

with FXFOWLE Architects, PC and the AIA Eastern New York AIA 150 Committee

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This Capital South Plan would not have been possible without the leadership, guidance, and dedication of these key professionals and neighborhood advocates who advised the development of the plan.

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For more information about the **Capital South Plan: *SEGway to the Future***, please visit the City of Albany website at www.albanyny.gov or contact Monique Wahba, South End Project Manager at the City of Albany Department of Development and Planning at (518) 434-2532 x26.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Key Recommendations of the Capital South Plan	ii
1 Introduction: Collaboration for a New Plan	1
The Planning Process	2
Plan Goals	4
Plan Structure	5
2 A Profile of the Neighborhood	7
2.1 Overview	7
2.2 Demographic Characteristics	10
2.3 Economics, Income, and Employment	13
2.4 Housing Characteristics	15
3 Stabilize the South End	21
3.1 Physical Planning	21
3.2 Workforce and Business Development	31
3.3 Quality of Life	35
4 Energize the South End	41
4.1 Physical Planning	41
4.2 Workforce and Business Development	51
4.3 Quality of Life	54
5 Grow the South End	63
5.1 Physical Planning	64
5.2 Workforce and Business Development	76
5.3 Quality of Life	79
6 Appendix	87
6.1 Implementation Matrix	89
6.2 Guiding Principles for Development	95
6.3 Capital South Planning and Design Criteria	97
6.4 Transportation	107

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Population Projections, 1980 - 2040	11
Figure 2: Population Growth, 1990 - 2000	11
Table 1: South End Population and Households, 1990 – 2011	12
Figure 3: Household Composition, 2000.....	12
Figure 4: Racial Composition, 2000.....	13
Figure 5: Educational Attainment, 2000.....	15
Figure 6: Household Projections, 2000 - 2040.....	16
Table 2: Housing Units, 2000.....	16
Figure 7: Housing Tenure, 2000	17
Figure 8: Tenure by Age of Householder, South End, 2000	17
Figure 9: Housing Characteristics, 2000.....	18
Figure 10: Housing Units by Year Built, 2000	19
Figure 11: Median Value, Owner-occupied Units, 2000	20

List of Maps

Map 1: Capital South and South End Context	7
Map 2: South End Core Study Area.....	8
Map 3: Existing Land Uses in the Core Area	9
Map 4: Historic District Boundaries.....	10
Map 5: Key Historic Buildings	26
Map 6: Greening Opportunities.....	29
Map 7: Employment Centers	32
Map 8: Housing Authority sites in the South End.....	43
Map 9: Homeownership Opportunity Sites within the Groesbeckville Historic District.....	46
Map 10: South End Guild District.....	50
Map 11: Schools & Community Resources	58
Map 12: Residential Opportunity Sites.....	61
Map 13: Current Projects and Future Opportunity Sites	64
Map 14: Capital South Educational Corridor.....	67
Map 15: The DMV site at Morton & South Pearl.....	71
Map 16: Grow the South End.....	73
Map 17: SEGway (South End Greenway)	80

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Albany's "South End" generally refers to the southernmost portion of the City and includes a very broad area extending from roughly the Empire State Plaza south to the city limits; and from the Hudson River and Interstate 787 west to Delaware Avenue. It encompasses eight neighborhoods in total.

The core of the South End, a triangle bounded by Morton Avenue and Lincoln Square on the north, and South Pearl Street on the east, connected by a hypotenuse formed by Third Avenue, is the primary focus of this Plan. This area was recognized as in need of revitalization planning for three key reasons: (1) at the beginning of this planning effort, it was only community within the South End that was without an active neighborhood association; (2) it lies in the heart of the South End adjacent to significant community assets and opportunities including Lincoln Square, Giffen Memorial Elementary School, several civic buildings, Schuyler Mansion, and numerous churches; (3) plan coordinators recognized the need to work at a small scale where an immediate impact could be felt, and where existing public-private investments could be bolstered.

This plan focuses on the South End core and embraces the Mansion and Historic Pastures neighborhoods, recognizing the *need to enhance the entire area and build upon its location within the Capital city*. Thus this plan is entitled "Capital South" in order underline the interdependence of these three neighborhoods and their common interests, link them to the assets of New York State's Capital City and the larger Capital Region, and embrace the spirit of vision and inclusivity that have guided these planning efforts. The subtitle "*SEGway to the Future*" highlights several important aspects of the plan. First, the letters S, E, G correspond to the three critical phases of the plan: Stabilize, Energize, and Grow. Second, the letters correspond to South End Greenway, a green and transit-friendly connector between the neighborhood, downtown, University Heights, the Hudson River, and the greater region. Finally, it evokes the forward-thinking optimism that has spurred this entire planning process.

The core of the South End boasts important strengths and exciting opportunities. And, while it is in need of investment and upgrade, it has the prerequisites for revitalization—a central location, intact urban fabric, and committed residents and stakeholders. These stakeholders, with public and private partners, have already begun to reinvest in the South End. New development activity (the Jared Holt Wax Factory Development, Howe Library and Giffen Memorial Elementary School Renovations, the Morton at Eagle Street Apartments Rehabilitation, etc.) and new commercial opportunities (the South Pearl Street Coliseum), are sources of excitement and new promise.

Physically, the South End is a checkerboard of historic homes, vacant lots, neighborhood institutions, and abandoned property. A vast number of older vacant residential buildings and vacant lots, eroded commercial corridors, a declining population, and an increasing concentration of poverty have plagued the South End for years. This comprehensive community plan recognizes that there are serious challenges to revitalizing the South End, and that the community will rise or fall based on the effectiveness of its stakeholders to implement a concerted revitalization effort. Existing efforts in this regard are extremely positive and point to the dedication of the South End's residents, businesses and representatives, and the full support of the City, including the Mayor, City agencies and the Common Council.

These groups have indeed collaborated several times on past efforts, but the past twelve months have been the most exciting, with the blossoming of the South End Action Committee (SEAC) as the key advisor and future implementation leader of this plan, and the realization of some major steps toward redevelopment and revitalization.

SEAC led an inclusionary planning process. From the outset, a key goal has been to provide opportunities for current residents to remain in, and thrive in, the South End while recognizing that new growth—from new residents of higher incomes and from new businesses—will be required to sustain the improvements proposed by this plan.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CAPITAL SOUTH PLAN

Past planning efforts have been incredibly successful at building a constructive dialogue and dedicated group of stakeholders interested in the future of the South End. What is now needed is a plan that both presents an exciting vision and implementable actions that generate short- and long-term success.

This plan is intended to be holistic, tackling diverse issues and tying them together into a cohesive and realistic set of recommendations. To realize the community's vision of once again becoming a community of choice, the plan identifies three steps toward revitalization:

1. **Stabilize** the neighborhood, to provide the foundation for market renewal. The estimated timeline for these actions is within the first two years.
2. **Energize** the neighborhood, while ensuring resident participation and equity in market renewal. The estimated timeline for these actions is from year two to year five.
3. **Grow** the neighborhood, for the benefit of current and future residents, enhance South End's links with the entire Capital South area and the City as a whole. The estimated

timeline for these actions is between years four and ten, overlapping in part with the Energize phase.

The first “layer” of revitalization, **Stabilize**, is detailed in Chapter 3 and contains short-term actions intended to stabilize the neighborhood and reassure its current residents that their investments and efforts will be rewarded. These include anti-crime measures, homeownership programs and other initiatives. It addresses the need to provide immediate employment opportunities in jobs that are within reach of many of the lower-skilled residents. It makes recommendations that will lay the foundation for market renewal and an increase in property values, but also provides current residents with the reason and opportunity to remain in the South End. The Stabilize phase is intended to focus on *initiatives that are currently taking place, and recommendations that are achievable within the next two years*. It recognizes the need to create disposition plans for key blocks of the neighborhood, particularly those around new development, and the need to protect and enhance resources like historic buildings, community facilities, and green spaces. And finally, recommendations are made to increase community capacity through the establishment of watch groups, neighborhood associations, and a broader Capital South coalition, in order to take charge of the implementation process and participate in the community’s renewal.

It cannot be overstated that stabilization is required before long term renewal can begin, and before any of the broader recommendations in this plan can succeed. Ultimately, the success of this plan should be judged not by large physical projects, but by the increasing safety and desirability of the neighborhood and its everyday quality of life.

The second stage, **Energize**, is detailed in Chapter 5 and describes medium-term actions intended to attract new investment, and make the South End a “community of choice”. These include housing development and revitalization, rebuilding or replacing aged public housing, and building a community center. This is also the time to capitalize on and “connect the dots” between the significant public and private investments that are now occurring, including the new development at the Jared Holt Wax Factory site, the Morton Avenue apartments, Habitat for Humanity’s development, the renovations to Howe Library and Giffen School, and the expansion plans of the Capital City Rescue Mission. This stage also sees the planning process for the redevelopment of Lincoln Square, the Morton/South Pearl intersection and DMV site, and lower South Pearl Street and the South End Guild take shape and bear fruit. It promotes further education and workforce development, better access to employment centers, and more quality of life improvements, including planning for a community center, upgrading parks, and improving the neighborhood’s overall image, and hence, desirability. Finally, it recommends continued community capacity improvements, including development of a citywide community develop-

ment corporation, targeted public funding and grant-making, and continued support for social networking and civic engagement.

The final stage, **Grow**, is detailed in Chapter 6 and provides long-term actions that are more visionary, and respond to potential big opportunities. This stage builds upon the success of the previous stages with the premise that once the neighborhood's image and quality of life improve, the marketplace will be strong enough to respond longer term visions. These include a fully redeveloped Lincoln Square, if not as an educational campus then as a mixed-income housing development, continuing block-by-block improvements in the core of the neighborhood itself, commercial redevelopment along South Pearl Street, including the South End Guild, a redeveloped mixed-use DMV site with a grocery store, a new civic space called the Capital South Square, and the SEGway, a continuous and safe connections between the Capital South communities, downtown, University Heights, the Port, and the Hudson River. It emphasizes that each redevelopment opportunity is also an employment opportunity, and local training and employment is necessary to sustain success. Finally, this plan places Capital South in a position of strength to participate in the economic success of the broader Capital region and the comprehensive plan for the City.

Each of the plan's recommendations build upon each other, with the foundation being what can be done within the next two years to benefit the current residents of the South End.

The action items for each phase are organized into four primary focus areas, as follows:

1. Physical Planning: housing investment, historic preservation and rehabilitation, home-steading, new development, transportation improvements.
2. Workforce and Business Development: access to jobs, transit to employment centers, business development.
3. Quality of Life: crime prevention, alternatives to crime, code enforcement, cleanliness, community amenities.
4. Community Capacity: community organizing, public/private partnerships, citizen/government task forces.

The matrix included in the Appendix of this plan details actions within each of these three phases. The numbered recommendations correspond to each of the recommendations within the plan text.