

# The Development of King Street as Charleston's Commercial Center

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From its conception, the creation, existence, and expansion of Charleston have been a function of economic growth. Throughout most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Charleston was growing physically and economically at unprecedented rates, becoming one of the largest and wealthiest colonies on the eastern seaboard. Urban growth and development within the city was a direct and logical manifestation of this prosperity. As Jeanne Calhoun and Martha Zierden observe, “[c]ompetition forced both merchants and craftsmen to consider their locations in terms of cost of transport, access to materials, and convenience to customers. Their decisions reflect the demands of their businesses as well as the desires of their customers” (1). This geographic spread based on proximity to resources and economic opportunities would be perhaps the single most influential factor in Charleston’s subsequent 300 years of development.

The original street plan and subsequent development of the colony reflects the foresight of the colonists to create a system of infrastructure that was designed to support the trade economy. The primary north-south roads were planned, East Bay and Market Streets, and the primary east-west road, Broad Street, served to connect East Bay, Market, and the wharf docks, essentially creating a mini central trade district within which merchants could cluster to create and sell products, with proximity to the docks for accessibility for importing

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and exporting. King Street, however, was not a consideration for most of the colony's early history. Not included in the commercial district nor even within the defining walls of the colony, King Street was used predominantly as the high path for coming in and out of town until the mid 1700s, when the colony had experienced significant prosperity and merchants and artisans expanded outward as a result of decreasing availability and increasing costs of real estate.

However, contemporary Charleston now boasts an expanded central business district with King Street standing at the physical and economic center, housing a large portion of the city's retail and commercial business. Arguably the most important and renowned street in Charleston, the King Street of today is radically different than the King Street of the previous three centuries. This essay will discuss the physical, economic, and social factors that caused the major transformation of King Street from a largely underutilized "broad path" into the main commercial district of the city. Particular emphasis will be placed on three main events and their impacts: The rise of a strong merchant class with substantial political and civic power, the construction of the Railroad for commercial transportation, and the 20<sup>th</sup>-century revitalization of Charleston's historic infrastructure and the promotion of the historic district.

The essay is divided into three main historical sections that consider major developments, events, and shifts in attitudes that occurred in that time period. These sections are: (1) colonial commercial development, (2) The 19<sup>th</sup> century: the railroad and the Civil War, and (3) The 20<sup>th</sup> century and the preservation movement. After these historical sections, the essay offers a critical overview of the development of King Street.

### **1679-1776: Colonial Commercial Development**

In 1679, when it was ordered that colonists move from their original settlement at Charles Towne Landing, (in modern day West Ashley), to the Peninsula between the Cooper and Ashley Rivers, Maurice Mathews, surveyor general for Carolina, described the new Charles Towne settlement at Oyster Point as follows:

That point which you see divides the River was called the Oyster point, but by an express order from the Lords Proprietors is henceforth to be called Charles Towne and to be our chief town

in the two rivers which it divides... The situation of this town is so convenient for public commerce that it rather seems to be the design of some skillful artist than the accidental position of nature. The town is run out into four large streets. (*Proprietary Records of SC* 3.23).

The colonists realized that by relocating the Colony to the peninsula, between an abundance of natural resources and a port, they would position Charles Towne to become a major economic player.

King Street was original to the Lord's Proprietors plan for the colony of Charles Towne, along with other primary thoroughfares like Meeting Street and Broad Street. It was constructed along the highest ridge of town so that it would not flood, but was not intended to serve any real commercial purpose. Originally, streets nearer to the water and wharf docks like Broad and Meeting Streets were designated and used for commerce and retail, and when the walls of the colony were constructed along Meeting Street in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, commerce stalled there until the wall was dismantled.

Unlike the first settlement, these streets were to be laid out in "broad and straight lines" (Stumpf 16-17). Most physical accounts of Charles Towne during the 1700s discuss the distinctive, regular street layout that seemed simultaneously provincial and urbane (Stumpf 67). Along the main roads, land was to be divided into half-acre lots. As early as 1686, King Street was mapped on the surveyor's plat map and labeled the "Little street that runneth from Mrs. Benson's northerly." However, until as late as the 1780s, King Street was still considered a secondary street, and would not be conceptually included in the core commerce district for another half century (Calhoun and Zierden 23).

Although ideally situated for commerce as a port, with proximity to abundant natural resources, Charleston experienced a slow start. Its first decade of commercial presence was somewhat stagnant because of the unsystematic arrangement of the trade for furs and constant harassment from pirates. The fur trade functioned under the premise that the frontier traders would come to Charleston every spring with their animal skins, trading them with merchants for goods from overseas like cloth, rum, implements, arms, and ammunition. The skins were then sent to Britain or off to the northern colonies (Stumpf 43). Truly, until the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the colony developed staple

crops such as rice, indigo, and cotton, the mercantile operations of the colony were mostly unstructured and dependent upon undocumented trade agreements with the Native Americans. As both crop cultivation and the fur trade grew and exportation became more systemized, Charles Towne colonists experienced an unprecedented influx of wealth. This wealth revolutionized the social, political, and economic character of the colonial port (Stumpf 38).

The economic opportunities of the colony attracted merchants from overseas who were interested in improving the commercial viability of the colony and accumulating personal wealth through its prosperity. Most of the overseas merchants were connected in various ways with wealthy London merchants who were able to offer financial investments or credit in order to increase the operations of the expanded fur and crop trades (Stumpf 42-43).

The development of rice as the main crop around 1700 demanded a new group of merchants who could deal with the marketing and trading of this new staple, an operation that was beyond the means of the planters. For the period between 1724 and 1774, rice shipped from Charleston's ports accounted for almost two-thirds of the total value of the province's exports (Calhoun and Zierden 11). Charleston also experienced an increase in the cultivation and exportation of indigo, as well as "products of the back country" like lumber and naval stores (Calhoun and Zierden 11). One of the earliest demonstrations of Charleston's new commercial prestige was the recruitment of a printer to come to the peninsula and facilitate the first publication of the *South Carolina Gazette* in January 1732. Through the *Gazette*, Charleston merchants were able to augment their operations by giving and receiving current prices of local commodities, keeping track of ship schedules, maintaining their knowledge of local and foreign news, and advertising their goods. By the time of the American Revolution, Charleston was, without a doubt, the commercial capital of the south. With the increased demand for crop cultivation, the demand for African slaves increased exponentially (Calhoun and Zierden 12).

During this period of great economic development and even for decades after, merchants and retailers chose store locations based on proximity to the wharves, where they would be sending and receiving materials, products, and profits. Calhoun and Zierden include the

following chart of the physical distribution of merchants throughout the peninsula based on advertisements placed during six five-year periods (20):

**Table 1: Merchant Locations in Colonial Charleston**

	1732- 1737	1738- 1743	1744- 1749	1750- 1755	1756- 1761	1762- 1767
No address	17	17	49	40	60	67
Indeterminate	19	12	15	11	11	12
On the bay	31	20	43	34	27	29
Church Street	7	11	9	9	9	7
Union Street	1	5	6	6	1	2
Meeting Street	0	0	0	0	0	4
King Street	0	4	2	1	1	1
Broad Street	17	27	27	26	35	42
Tradd Street	4	14	10	12	19	22
Elliot Street	8	13	15	12	10	12
Queen Street	0	3	0	1	2	4
Wharves	12	14	17	19	28	20

The most popular locations of merchants were on the bay, on the wharves, and on Broad Street, Church Street, and Tradd Street. King Street had zero merchant addresses listed for the first time period, and between only one and four merchants documented for the following time periods. Meeting Street consistently had zero merchants documented, in keeping with the fact that the wall was constructed along the street at this time.

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, commerce was the dictating force of colony growth and change; therefore, the locations and movements of

merchants and craftsmen serve as a good indicator of development within the colony. Until about 1770, location of merchants predominantly followed the east-west streets and expansion moved west, toward the Ashley River, and until as late as the 1780s, King Street was still considered a secondary street, beyond the boundaries of the core commerce district (Calhoun and Zierden 19-23).

As Charleston entered the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time period characterized by Alfred Glaze Smith as a “bonanza period” of economic growth, King Street experienced a major surge in mercantile importance (qtd. in Greb 18). A second chart by Calhoun and Zierden with merchant locations between 1805 and 1860 shows that by 1829 merchants located on King Street had surpassed every other location, including East Bay Street and the wharves. This trend would continue for the rest of the century, encouraged by the placement of the railroad terminus between King and Meeting Streets in the 1830s (Calhoun and Zierden 37-38). When transportation of goods and people by train, and later by streetcar, became a viable commercial option, even East Bay and the wharves *combined* could not compete with the land-based transport that dumped directly onto King Street.

Charleston was, generally speaking, a colony motivated by the desire to accumulate and display wealth and, although this desire was moderated by periods of economic instability, it is evident that grand displays of wealth were important in every aspect of the colony’s growth, particularly in the development and strengthening of the commercial district. As the city grew and prospered, there became an increasingly evident specialization of professions and merchandise available. In 1854 Charles Fraser admired King Street as “now so attractive, with its gorgeous windows and dazzling display of goods emulating a Turkish Bazaar... inviting [the ladies] to a daily promenade” (qtd. in Calhoun and Zierden 38). These observations touch on the fact that King Street now hosted a variety of high-end, specialty shops, and was a thriving commercial center.

### **19<sup>th</sup> Century: The Railroad and the Civil War**

Although Charleston experienced a great amount of growth throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this growth occurred in waves alternating with periods of stagnation or mild decline. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charleston experienced a particularly heavy-handed period of

economic stagnation as settlement began to move inward and upstate, spreading westward and taking commerce with it. This problem was compounded by several major fires that plagued the city, as well as an unrelated, but equally disruptive, widespread economic downturn caused by the Panic of 1819 (Funk 188). However, Charleston had a distinct commercial advantage that could not be fabricated further inland: its well-established seaport was one of the primary import and export hubs of the American south. However, the nearby seaport of Savannah, always a competitor, had begun to surpass Charleston as the leading seaport, particularly with Georgia cotton exports.

In a letter to the *Post and Courier* (27 Oct. 1827), a writer under the pseudonym “South Carolina” wrote:

It is known to us that all the retail trade of Charleston, which was a few years ago the life and spirit of our town, has been cut off and intercepted by a chain of small towns... You will recognize in this chain the towns of Cheraw, Camden, Columbia, and Hamburg.” (qtd. in Phillips 134)

The writer went on to offer a practical solution, outlining a system of canals that would intercept the flatboat trade of the Hamburg-Augusta region. Two years later, Robert Mills also published a pamphlet in support of a South Carolina central waterway that would consolidate steamboat traffic and make transportation for delivering goods by land more feasible. At the time of publication, freight rate to transport goods by water from Charleston to Columbia was \$1.50 per bale of cotton. However, the route was so long and dangerous that many shippers elected to send their goods by land at double the cost, \$3.00 per bale of cotton (Phillips 135). The Charleston merchants and civic elites came to realize that a more workable transportation system was necessary in order to make Charleston commercially viable once more.

Although a central canal was never built, the idea of rerouting trade back to Charleston would ultimately come to fruition within the decade: In 1827, a Charleston citizen’s meeting drafted a petition requesting two land surveys, one for constructing a canal between the Ashley and Savannah Rivers, and the other for constructing a railroad between Charleston and Augusta. The latter, to be named the *Best Friend of Charleston*, would be constructed and running within six years at a total

cost of \$904,499.00 (Phillips 152). At the opening celebration held in Charleston on October 2, 1833, Elias Horry, (then President of the rail company), congratulated Charleston on her great accomplishment and discussed the prospect of continuing the line further to the north and west in order to efficiently trade with the Piedmont region and the American West.

The railroad caused shifts in economic activity on the peninsula. Around the same time, the advent of steamboats maintained the level of activity on the wharves and East Bay docks. The retailing of imported goods, however, was shifting to King Street, in part as a result of the new railroad terminus between King and Meeting Street (Calhoun and Zierden 38). In the middle of the century, streetcars further aided this shift by transporting people from the railway terminus on the north end of town to the homes, businesses, and docks that stretched to the south end. Merchants no longer needed to be located directly on or around the wharf docks, and could establish their businesses in the central part of town, King Street. Supporting evidence shows that King Street became the predominant area for retailing between 1845 and 1850, a period directly following the completion of the railway line.

Although these transportation innovations provided a period of prosperity for the city that would last about three decades, ultimately the concept of the railroad exploded throughout the United States and Charleston became just one of many port cities accessible by rail. These countrywide transportation developments had almost reached their peak when the worldwide Panic of 1857 struck, stalling economic progress, specifically in the North. When the economy had mostly recovered around 1859, many pro-slavery southern merchants and politicians used it as an example of how the south and slave trade were necessary in order to keep a stable economy, and although the National economy would go on to fully recover in a few more years, Charleston was about to receive a severe, irrevocable blow to her economy in the form of Civil War and the abolition of slavery (Doyle 160).

While advances in transportation during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century worked to improve the economic viability of Charleston's ports and create the thriving economic center of King Street, the Civil War and the socioeconomic changes that followed in its wake had a



devastating effect that would take decades to overcome.

In an 1884 banquet for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Charleston Chamber of Commerce, William Trenholm surveyed the events of the previous quarter century, proclaiming that Charleston had been too dependent on agriculture and had produced a business class too weak to overcome that dependency. In 1884, Charleston's war wounds were still fresh, and not a soul knew how to heal them. Not only did war devastate large tracts of the city's commercial infrastructure, but it also completely demolished the ability of Southern cities to export agricultural produce. The Civil War ravaged the city's economy and left it "like a wreck on the shore... every prospect was dismal," bringing economic development throughout the peninsula to a halt (Doyle 185).

As evidenced, the Civil War was not a blow that could easily be remedied. Charleston had always been a genteel city, resistant to changes and progress, regarded as the "last bastion of the old regime" (Doyle 185). When stripped of its economic drive, the city was left unable to recompose itself and entered into a period of decline that would last well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Old King Street Preserved, 1900-Present**

Although this severe period of decline produced both an economic and physical decay of the city, the lack of progressive development ultimately served as its saving grace. Charleston has always been respectful and reverent of traditions and customs, many of which are embodied in the buildings and architecture that the city has fought to preserve. The fact that so many of Charleston's historic structures have survived to the present reflects a combination of two factors: Primarily, the city simply lacked investment income to build new structures after the Civil War. However, even if the money had been available then, as it had been for the earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charlestonians had always resisted large-scale redevelopment. The second and more widely cited reason is what Robert Stockton calls the "strong streak of conservatism" that manifested itself in efforts to preserve the historic fabric of the good old days when Charleston was grand and prosperous (Richardson 30). Although this lifestyle had since vanished, the buildings still remained and the citizens yearned to keep them around as testaments to their once great city.

The first half of the twentieth century addressed these desires

through institutionalization. During these years, multiple societies were founded including the Charleston Art Commission in 1910, the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings in 1920, and the Historic Charleston Foundation in 1947 (Richardson 35). In 1924, South Carolina passed legislature that allowed municipalities to draft and adopt zoning laws and, within six years, Charleston had implemented its Historic District Zoning Ordinance, the first preservation law passed in the entire United States.

The Historic District Zoning Ordinance emphasized special considerations for physical elements such as height restrictions, as well as defining a Historic District with its own set of ordinances and protections. The ordinance was implemented, creating the Old and Historic Charleston District and its governing body, the Board of Architectural Review (BAR), which was granted powers for reviewing and approving applications for alterations and new construction within the District (Richardson 36). However, the BAR remained unable to control the demolition of historic structures until 1959, when an amendment was passed stipulating that all structures “constructed before 1860 would be subject to the Board of Architectural Review when demolition or change was proposed” (Richardson 37). This amendment stretched the jurisdiction of the BAR across the entire old city, as it provided for the protection of structures built before 1860, regardless of whether they were inside the District or not. In 1966, several other amendments were passed that served to strengthen historic preservation efforts citywide, including nearly tripling the size of the Historic District, enlarging the powers of the BAR, and creating a provision entitled Demolition by Neglect, which dealt with the maintenance required to prevent irrevocable deterioration of historic structures (Richardson 38).

Charleston’s preservation efforts had a huge impact on the retail section of King Street from Calhoun south to Market Street. As it evolved in the 18th and 19th centuries, the city came to display a degree of visual coherence and sophistication, in a mixed set of pre-industrial European and American architectural styles (Tung). This was particularly evident on King Street, where eight blocks of connected low-rise commercial buildings lined the broad sidewalks and shared compatible heights, window courses, styles, colors, and details. In

the second half of the twentieth century, however, this commercial architecture was being threatened by demolition, inappropriate remodeling, and neglect. In 1980, the City of Charleston developed a King Street Façade Program to “stimulate the rehabilitation of commercial facades on King Street between Calhoun and George” (Façade Program 1). The purpose of this initiative was to encourage rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the historic structures in the commercial core without diminishing the historical character of the corridor. These efforts have been widely received as innovative and successful methods to encourage growth within a historic district.

Although a strong sense of stylistic cohesion is presented along the street, it is more accurate to describe the architecture as a cohesive melding of over 300 years of commercial function. In discussing the preservation of King Street, it is important to first consider the time span it displays, including four defined periods of architectural style:

1. Early Development period 1780-1838
2. Post Fire Period 1838-1860
3. Victorian Period 1860-1900
4. Twentieth Century Period 1900- Present

It is possible to observe a noticeable shift in both style and construction with the advent of each new development period (King Street Façade 4). The resulting “character” of the streetscape reflects an accumulation of facades, often in fragmented dates and styles (King Street Façade 7). In the Early Development period, the facades are almost all residential structures cushioned by intermittent empty lots. In the Post-Fire/Antebellum period, the empty lots begin to fill in with commercial style facades, altering the visual character. During the Victorian period, more commercial structures are built on the remaining empty lots and the street character becomes denser and still more varied. Finally, in the contemporary period with the advent of historic preservation, we see a remodeling of existing structures to represent later styles, further contributing to the variety of the street. Throughout each of these phases, however, certain elements like roof and cornice heights, windows, and floor divisions are not significantly varied, and therefore

produce a repeated visual pattern that runs the length of the street.

When discussing King Street from a planning perspective it is often more useful to consider the entire streetscape, although from a preservation and remodeling perspective it remains important to understand the individual architectural elements. Each individual façade contributes (1) a wall, (2) structural rhythms, and (3) window openings. These three components work together to establish the basic composition that is both strong and flexible, as it is repeated continuously but also open to variability in decoration, windows, and storefront (King Street Façade Program 11).

In *The Future of the Past*, Steven Semes effectively discusses the preservation principles at work on King Street in his chapter on Abstract Reference. Semes defines Abstract Reference as a strategy that “seeks to defer to the historic setting while consciously avoiding literal resemblance or working in a historical style” (209). Through this strategy, new construction in a historic setting will maintain a visual continuity with its surroundings without truly recreating any historical architecture, primarily through vaguely referencing historical elements of adjacent structures. Typically, this creates a compatible silhouette with a conforming height and width. Within the silhouette, important divisional elements like windows, openings, rooflines, and moldings will be placed on visually similar planes, but they are simplified. This process of simplification edits out small-scale details and ornamentation that provide historical references. By continuing visual patterns without directly imitating traditional forms, architects can integrate new structures into a historic streetscape, forging a sympathetic relationship between two opposing styles.

As previously discussed, the façade initiative has been wildly successful throughout the past thirty years in working to revitalize the King Street corridor while preserving the historic character, making it truly one of the most renowned retail and tourist destinations in the country.

### **Looking Ahead**

As set forth in *Vision, Community, Heritage*, the 2008 preservation plan for the city, preservation efforts must continue to be an integral part of King Street’s development. Among other elements, the plan specifically delineates the continued safeguarding of lower-peninsula

historic resources and streetscapes, providing incentives to encourage structure reuse, and ensuring that new construction in historic districts will “achieve a design, height, and density congruous with existing commercial buildings” (136-40). Charleston is determined to maintain and strengthen nostalgic ties to old buildings, but some debate whether Charleston has crossed a line from preservation into dysfunctional regulation. Critics argue that the city has become so preoccupied with preserving the past that it has completely forgotten to plan for its future. This local debate fits in the broader context of what Semes calls a “search for an appropriate response to the conflicting claims of continuity and change applied to a built environment” (28). He contrasts one viewpoint, that buildings are “documents of their time,” and should be preserved for historical significance rather than functional relevance, to the view that buildings are living entities that must grow to accommodate change while maintaining character (29). This latter perspective shows how historic preservation can be equally focused on the future and the past; that knowledge gleaned through preservation can be applied to the methods that shape how the city will grow.

### **Analysis and Conclusions: Marion Square and the Charleston Place Hotel**

Let us consider the two bookends of the area of study: At the north end where King Street meets Calhoun Street sits the most popular open space in the entire city, Marion Square, and at the other end sits the beautiful Charleston Place Hotel, at King Street and Market Street. These two attractions represent the Old Charleston, the New Charleston, and everything in between, serving as a wonderful microcosm of the whole city.

Marion Square was “developed” very early on in the history of the Colony, as early as 1758. The ten-acre plot was conveyed to Charles Towne and would serve as home to a military fort, tobacco inspection facilities, the Old Citadel, several monuments, and ultimately, a public park at the busiest intersection in town. At the time of its creation, Marion Square sat outside the boundaries of the town, north of Calhoun Street. As mercantilism and commerce in the colony grew, residential and commercial development engulfed and surpassed the square, spreading all the way up the neck of the peninsula. It is worth

taking a moment to consider the fact that what is today considered the very heart of downtown Charleston was never intended to be in the center at all. The square and surrounding neighborhoods have developed along the grid pattern as a result of increased development pressures exerted by King Street.

Another factor to consider is the location of the railway terminus discussed in section III, placed between King and Meeting Streets just a block north of Marion Square. Although the terminus was also placed outside of the city's boundaries, over time wealth and necessity worked together to close the gap between transportation and the commercial district. Today, King Street and Calhoun Street are the two busiest thoroughfares in the city, and Marion Square sits grandly at the northeast corner of their junction as a testament to Charleston's commitment to preserving its rich history. I use Marion Square as the primary example of Charleston's dedication to keeping its history at the center of the city's memory because despite centuries of development and change on all four sides, Marion Square still exists today.

At the other end of King Street sits the opposite bookend, representing a separate set of Charleston ideals: the Charleston Place Hotel. The Hotel sits at the corner of King Street and Market Street, spanning the entire block with a second entrance opening onto Meeting Street. At the time of conception, that area of King Street, and multiple blocks in either direction had become abandoned and neglected. When Charleston Place Hotel opened to guests in 1986, that moment marked one of the most profound shifts in King Street's economic function in almost two centuries as the major economic focus evolved from import-export commercialism to a tourism-based market. With the hotel serving as a wealthy, luxurious anchor for the south end of the peninsula, banks began to locate along Meeting Street. Big-name retail corporations like Saks Fifth Avenue sought out locations along King Street, and blocks of historic structures were renovated and put into commercial use once again with the help of the King Street Façade program. By serving as a wealthy, respectable symbol of economic viability along King Street, the Hotel got people to come back to downtown Charleston, often the most difficult obstacle to overcome in an urban revitalization project.

Equally important as how the hotel changed King Street is how it

attempted to keep it the same, primarily through physical design. Any more modern or generic design for the hotel would not have engendered the same response in a city with such an abundance of historic architecture and a preservation movement in full swing. Charleston Place represents the ideals presented in the previous section of this essay on preservation and revitalization. Despite the fact that it was built in the mid-1980s, the architectural style is very much cohesive with the surrounding structures. As discussed in Semes' Abstract Reference, the building style for the hotel uses horizontal divisions, windows, and openings to create a visual cohesion. Although the central east-west portion of the hotel is tall, the street-level shops follow similar height and opening patterns as their neighboring structures. While no overt historical references are made, the brick structure with storefront openings is reminiscent of historical architecture found elsewhere on King Street.

The Charleston Place Hotel serves as a symbol of the new source of investment in Charleston's economy. Inarguably the most integral part of Charleston's economy since the latter half of the twentieth century, tourism has been the driving force behind a majority of the planning, preservation, economic, and political decisions that were made, particularly along King, Meeting, Broad, and Market Streets. The hotel represents a pivotal development in tourism commerce along King Street and, in a broader context, perhaps one of the most successful downtown revitalization efforts in history.

### **Downtown Revitalization and Quality Main Streets**

King Street serves as a testament to three centuries of commercial development and the productive effect of urban revitalization. In fact, King Street provides a model for how to reverse the decay of American commercial centers and historic architecture. Such revitalization does more than simply boost the economic viability of an area. In fact, there are a whole host of other urban area benefits brought to a revitalized commercial area, which can help build compact, mixed-use neighborhoods, enhance walkability, diversify housing stock, and support public and alternative transportation methods. Ideally, a self-reinforcing cycle is created as higher economic profits increase population, raise property values and taxes, create more business opportunity, and so on.

How can urban communities catalyze this cycle? This process requires cooperation between private corporations who desire to locate in the downtown area, and public organizations that are able to offer incentives to private corporations. Although King Street's revitalization preceded much of the published literature, its process followed a widely accepted theory of successful revitalization, as laid out by Christopher Leinberger (1-22). Among his list of successful steps, Leinberger includes the need for urban, commercial-supporting infrastructure like walkable sidewalks, transportation, defined public spaces, as well as potential for culture, entertainment, retail, and programming. King Street already possessed much of the necessary physical structure and historical character, and was receptive to subsequent steps. Leinberger focuses efforts on developing a strategic plan for the downtown area, addressing items like character, housing, retail, culture, employment, and social values. Once a downtown has contemplated and prioritized these elements, it can better understand how they can be addressed and engendered within an urban area. Clearly in the case of King Street, the most dominant elements were retail and character, and the booming retail and tourism industries today are evidence of an intense focus. According to Leinberger, once a strategic plan has been developed, it can be implemented via a strong private/public partnership. In these scenarios, developers, investors, and volunteers are motivated by personal ties as well as financial incentives that create a mutually beneficial interest for both corporations and politicians to revitalize the downtown area (Leinberger 9-11).

Leinberger proposes that once an economic district can stand without government intervention, it is able to support other important urban institutions like entertainment, rental housing, and local, community focused initiatives (12-22). In the past thirty years or so, particularly in cooperation with the College of Charleston, the revitalization of King Street has helped to spur development on Market Street, Meeting Street, and Upper King Street (above Calhoun) all of which now serve as vibrant entertainment areas for both tourists and locals. As the College of Charleston has expanded its student body size, the sharp increase in the number of quasi-permanent residents living in the area has increased the need for residential, commercial, and entertainment services, perpetuating the revitalizing cycle. Community



revitalization efforts that have helped to engender civic engagement in the business district have included the Marion Square farmers market, Second Sundays on King Street, various parades and the Cooper River Bridge run, which all make their way down King Street.

King Street continues to serve as a model for the successful principles of urban revitalization; however, its design and function are also mimicked in the design plans for the New Urbanism movement led by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. Rather than revitalizing existing downtowns, New Urbanism proposes to create “urban” districts from the very beginning, emphasizing compact development, mixed uses, street level retail, above level residences, broad sidewalks, street trees, on street parking, and walkability. A recent document published by the governing body, the Congress for the New Urbanism, outlined a method for creating “quality main streets.” The Congress proposes that main street land uses should be compact and mixed use, with a strong retail and entertainment function. The buildings are typically low-scale (three or four stories tall), are attached or very closely spaced, and have large street-level storefronts (Quality Mainstreets). There should be “wide streetsides” between storefronts and roads to engender social interactions, strolling, and window-shopping. Between the edge of the streetside and the roadway, street-side parking is suggested. Having on-street parking creates a buffer between the pedestrian and vehicular traffic, forcing cars to travel at slower speeds and allowing pedestrians to feel safer. Finally, one of the most suggested techniques for creating a quality Main Street refers to the architecture: The streetside architecture should present a visually unified frontage, utilizing similar or cohesive architectural styles and additions. Ironically all of these “new” urban elements can be found along the 300 year old King Street.

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