

CITY OF VALDOSTA

GATEWAY STUDY



PREPARED BY

**THE SOUTH GEORGIA
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

DECEMBER 2004

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Introduction

As the City of Valdosta emerges as a premiere metropolitan city in Georgia, it becomes important for citizens of the city and individuals traveling to the city to experience all that Valdosta has to offer.

People begin to form an impression of an area as soon as they enter it. Recognizing this fact, the City of Valdosta made it a priority to create the best possible feeling and image for the gateways into the city and downtown.

Working with the Community Development Department of the City of Valdosta, the South Georgia Regional Development Center inventoried, photographed, and assessed the ten gateways to provide recommendations that would fit within the city's goal of providing aesthetically pleasing entrances into the City of Valdosta.

Study Overview

Purpose and Intent:

The purpose and intent of the City of Valdosta Gateway Study is to evaluate the major entrances into the City of Valdosta and determine the steps necessary for making these areas more appealing to visitors and residents of the City of Valdosta.

Review Criteria:

Since each gateway area is unique, the identified areas were reviewed on the following six items.

Traffic Count – Traffic counts determine which areas receive the most exposure on a daily basis. Staff used these counts to prioritize the order of analysis. The Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) supplied the traffic counts to the City.

Code Enforcement – Each area was examined for compliance with the city codes and ordinances. This helped determine if the current codes, ordinances, and enforcement are effective in preserving and enhancing the visual impact of the gateways. Staff also reviewed code enforcement case data from the past two years to determine the enforcement issues effecting the gateways.

Landscaping – Landscaping provides an immediate visual impact on those passing through a gateway of the city. For most of the gateways, increased landscaping will provide an immediate and dramatic visual improvement. Properties were reviewed for amount and variety of landscaping. Where appropriate, additional publicly and privately maintained landscaping is recommended.

Signage – Signs for gateways can be addressed on two different levels. One aspect could be the municipal signs denoting either the boundary for the City of Valdosta or points of interest within the city (Valdosta State University, historic districts, city hall, the courthouse, etc.). Signage can also be examined on the basis of signs for business and advertisement in these areas. Signs in each gateway were reviewed based on use. Limiting the number, size, and type of sign will help travelers unfamiliar with Valdosta navigate the gateways more efficiently.

Zoning – If zoning is not compatible with the overall goal of providing aesthetically pleasing entrances into the City of Valdosta, changes need to occur to protect the resources in the identified areas. Staff examined the current zoning patterns around the identified gateways to determine if changes were necessary to ensure sound development.

Existing Land Use – Land uses play a major part in determining the strategies for improving each gateway. To maintain the overall goal of gateways, certain land uses should be discouraged from these areas while others should be encouraged. If precedents are set with incompatible land uses, it may be difficult to reclaim the area.

Recommendations – After each gateway was reviewed based on the preceding criteria, a recommendation was made. The recommendation takes into account both the positive aspects of the gateways and where improvements should be made. Finally, a course of action to improve the site was determined.

The Process:

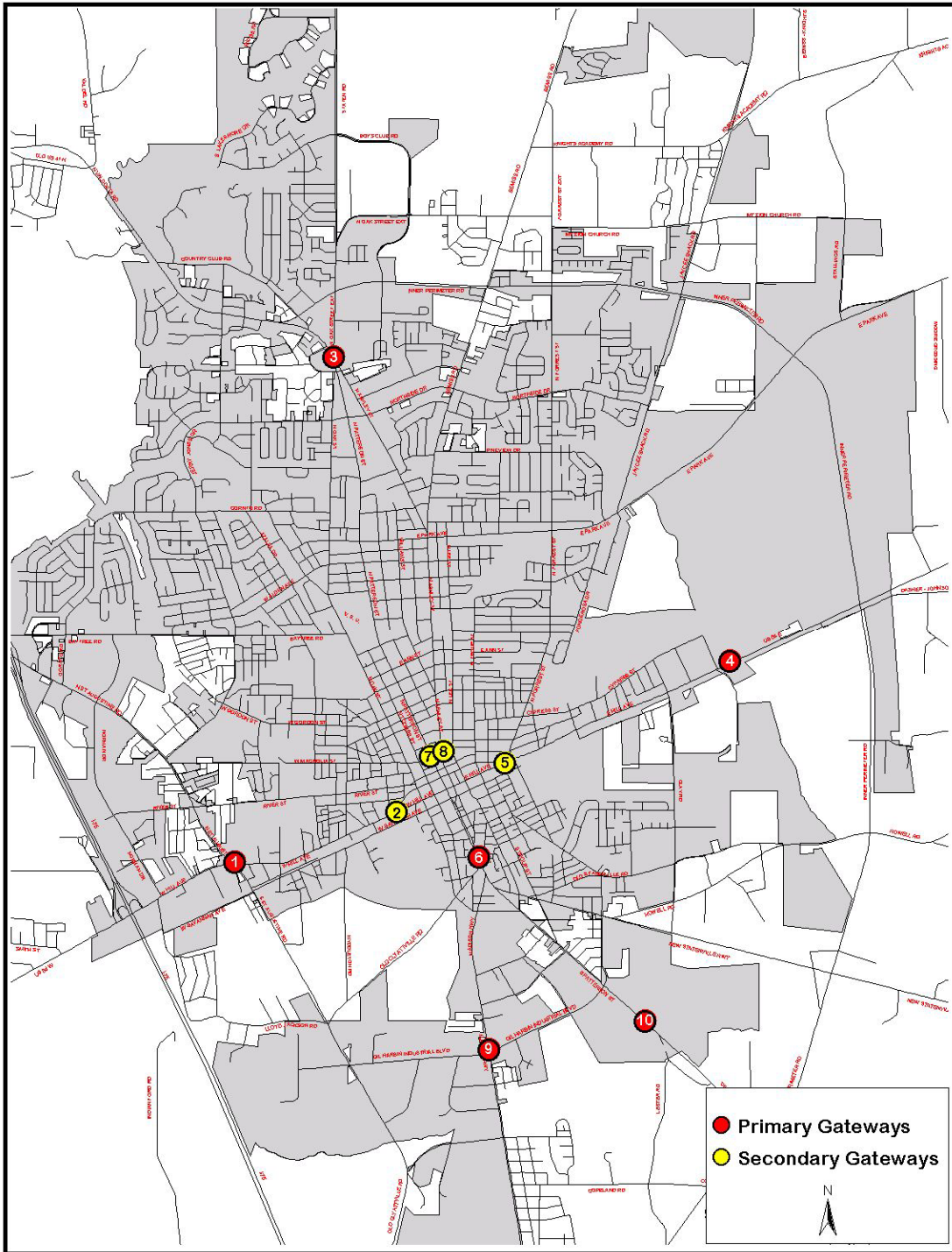
Planning staff of the South Georgia Regional Development Center (RDC) worked with the City Manager, City Engineer and Community Development Director to identify six primary gateways into the city and four secondary gateways into downtown. Staff gathered specific data for each of these designated gateways based on the above referenced criteria. Data was collected from the City of Valdosta Marshall's Office, the City of Valdosta Zoning Administrator, and the city's GIS data which is maintained by the South Georgia RDC through the VALOR (Valdosta/Lowndes Regional) Program.

The ten gateways are:

- 1) **West Hill** - Hill Avenue and St. Augustine Road (*the corridor running along Hill Avenue from St. Augustine Road to West Central Avenue*).
- 2) **West Central** - The West Hill Avenue and West Central Avenue intersection.
- 3) **Five Points** - The North Valdosta Road and North Oak Street Extension area.
- 4) **East Hill** - East Hill Avenue near the city limits.
- 5) **East Central** - The intersection of East Hill Avenue and East Central Avenue.
- 6) **South Patterson** - The area near South Patterson Street, Old Clyattville Road and Madison Highway.
- 7) **North Patterson** - The North Patterson Street and Magnolia Street intersection.
- 8) **North Ashley** - The intersection of North Ashley Street and Magnolia Street.
- 9) **Industrial Boulevard West** - The Madison Highway and Gil Harbin Industrial Boulevard intersection near the city limits.
- 10) **Industrial Boulevard East** - South Patterson Street/U.S. 41 near city limits.

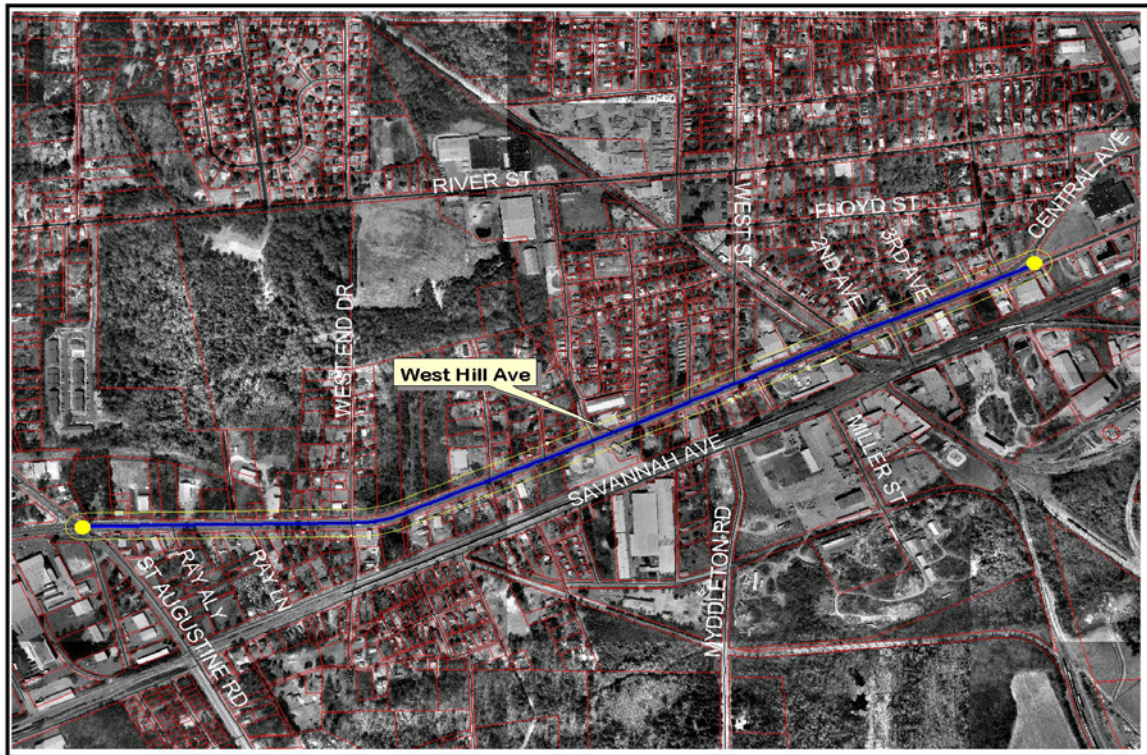
These ten gateways are listed in order of priority with the West Hill Corridor being the most important.

The following map indicates the approximate central location for each gateway. The primary gateways are colored in red. These gateways are entrances into the City of Valdosta. The secondary gateways are colored in yellow. These gateways are entrances into Downtown Valdosta.



The above map depicts the ten gateway locations throughout the City of Valdosta

Gateway Evaluation



The West Hill Corridor extends from St. Augustine Road to Central Avenue. The Corridor is depicted by the area outlined in yellow.

West Hill - Corridor

The West Hill Avenue Gateway Corridor is a unique section of road. This portion of Hill Avenue is a five lane highway leading to Downtown Valdosta. Hill Avenue is both a local road and a U.S. highway (U.S. 84). This route connects Valdosta with several other cities including Quitman, Thomasville, and Bainbridge as it continues into Dothan, Alabama and further west. To the east, U.S. 84 connects the cities of Waycross and Jesup.

Traffic Count – The West Hill Corridor is unique because there are numerous paths of traffic entering and exiting this area. The close proximity of Interstate 75 greatly increases the traffic impact on this area.

Starting from I-75 and proceeding east, there are periodic counts along Hill Avenue. From I-75 to Norman Drive there is a count of 23,724 trips per day. Next, after crossing St. Augustine Road, there is a count from Ray Lane to Ray Street of 18,074 trips per day. Further still, (approaching downtown) there is a count of 18,000 trips per day from Second Avenue to Third Avenue. This would indicate that, although some traffic is turning off of Hill Avenue, a majority of the vehicular traffic continues through Downtown Valdosta.

Some of the traffic turning off Hill Avenue travels on St. Augustine Road. Along St. Augustine, north of Hill Avenue, there is a count from Beck Street to Larue Drive of 14,982 trips per day.

Similarly, south of Hill Avenue along St. Augustine Road, there is a count of 12,240 trips per day from Dukes Bay Canal to Savannah Avenue.

Code Enforcement – Over the past two years there were several city code violations in this area. In particular there were five incidents of “people doing business without a license”, six incidents of “maximum height of grass and weeds within 100 feet of buildings”, and seven incidents of “maximum height of weeds, grass, etc. within 150 feet of public ways or property of another”. All of these violations have an impact on the area.

Landscaping – The West Hill Corridor lacks landscaping. Individual property owners provide the only real landscaping along this roadway. There is a small grass separation and curb between the sidewalk and the roadway. There are no obvious flowering plants or shrubbery maintained by the city along Hill Avenue.

Signage – The West Hill Corridor has a mixture of signs. There are some signs advertising existing businesses (on-premise signs) and there are some billboards (*Photos WH-C1, WH-C2, WH-C3*) that are advertising businesses outside this corridor (off-premise signs). When looking at the corridor from a distance, the signs seem to blend together (*Photo WH-C4*) because of their similarity to each other in style and height. This could be construed as a negative impact on the corridor.

There are almost no existing signs on the roadway indicating prominent features of the city. For example, the historic areas (including both national and local districts) are not advertised. Also, there are no distinctive signs providing directions to Valdosta State University.

These are just two of the areas where specialized signage would benefit the corridor.

Zoning – The zoning in the West Hill Corridor is almost exclusively C-H (Highway Commercial). This is the most intense commercial zoning and allows all activities listed in the zoning ordinance under *Business Uses* by right and only limits telecommunication towers and certain commercial amusement and recreation activities by special exception. It also allows for several light manufacturing uses.

One of the biggest problems from a zoning enforcement perspective is sign violations. This is a problem throughout the gateways in this study. The most common violations include temporary signs in the public right-of-way or on public structures such as telephone poles. These are primarily political signs, signs advertising sales, or similar signs.

Land Use – The land uses along west Hill Avenue are mixed. There are residences, churches, service stations, auto repair facilities, wholesale supply outlets, and general retail. However, these uses fit within the designated zoning district (Highway Commercial).

One issue that must be considered when looking at the West Hill Gateway Corridor is the proposed overpass. This overpass would move traffic over the current Georgia Southern & Florida Railroad line that crosses Hill Avenue. A structure of this kind will definitely impact this area and steps must be taken to minimize any negative effects.

A portion of the proposed overpass will extend into the Valdosta Local Historic District. This extension will have an impact on

Examples of signs along the Hill Avenue Corridor



Photo WH-C1—Looking east from Hill Avenue towards downtown at the first slight bend.



Photo WH-C2—Looking east toward downtown. The larger downtown buildings are now in view.



Photo WH-C3—Looking west along Hill Avenue just beyond the railroad tracks and potential overpass area.



Photo WH-C4—Looking east toward downtown. The first views of downtown are just becoming visible.

the district, however it is not clear as to the extent the impact will be.

Recommendation – The West Hill Corridor is one of the main entrances into the City of Valdosta. Since it is a U.S. Highway, it receives between 20,000 and 30,000 trips from both passenger and freight vehicles. There are several areas that should be improved upon to positively impact the corridor.

Hill Avenue is classified as an urban principal arterial. The land uses are, for the most part, appropriate for the roadway. Most of the land uses are commercial in nature, which fits the zoning on Hill Avenue. Hill Avenue is almost completely developed, although there are still several vacant lots. It is important to keep any new uses in-line with the existing nature of the roadway.

- 1) One area that could greatly improve the Hill Avenue Corridor is landscaping. As mentioned before, there is very little landscaping on Hill Avenue that is maintained by the city.

One possible way to improve the landscaping would be center landscape islands creating a boulevard effect. Hill Avenue currently has a center turn lane that could be utilized (in some areas) for these landscape islands.

A potential concern with landscape islands would be access to the properties along Hill Avenue. Currently, there are approximately 140 curb cuts on Hill Avenue from St. Augustine Road to Central Avenue (*see map below*). Of the 140 curb cuts, only 18 are street intersections.

There are numerous properties that have multiple curb cuts, some undeveloped properties with multiple curb cuts, and some properties at street intersections that have access from the side streets and multiple curb cuts on Hill Avenue. It would be possible to find several locations where landscape islands would be feasible.

Since Hill Avenue is a Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) roadway, the use of landscape islands may not be



feasible. Instead, the grass areas along the curbs could be widened to incorporate plantings. The curb areas could also be widened to accommodate larger sidewalks. The sidewalks could become multi-use paths and used by both pedestrians and bicyclists if made wide enough.

- 2) Signs play an important part in the visual impact along Hill Avenue. Since the city has incorporated sign regulations into their zoning ordinance, there should no longer be any major issues with new signage.

It would be necessary to have an inventory of the signage along Hill Avenue to determine the types and sizes of the existing signage. Signs are an important part of maintaining viable and stable businesses. However, non-commercial signs (in a corridor such as this) could possibly detract from the area and create distractions for motorists.

It is not the intention to eliminate signs from the West Hill Corridor, merely make the area more visually appealing through quality signs and identifying markers for predominant areas of the city including city hall, the county courthouse, local and National Register historic districts and Valdosta State University.

- 3) One visually detracting aspect is the overhead utility lines and poles. Burying these utilities would greatly improve the appearance of the Hill Avenue Corridor.
- 4) Another item to consider on Hill Avenue is the potential of multi-modal transportation lanes for both buses and bicycles.

Hill Avenue is an ideal roadway for incorporating transit lanes of this nature since it connects to downtown.

- 5) Land use issues have a major role in the overall aesthetic of the Hill Avenue Gateway. The zoning throughout this corridor will dictate both the current and future land uses for this area. Similarly, the land uses will have a major impact on aspects like traffic (vehicular and pedestrian) and development trends for this corridor.

One of the most difficult tasks will be deciding what land uses are appropriate to ensure the vitality of the corridor without disrupting the movement of traffic through the corridor. It will also be important to eliminate or discontinue attractive nuisances along the corridor. This could include vacant lots, or structures that have been left in disrepair.

These are five possible ways to improve the overall appearance and versatility of the Hill Avenue Corridor. The options can be taken as a whole or separately. The pages that follow will show how some of the options may look to aid in the selection process.

The following photos represent potential changes along the Hill Avenue Corridor as described in the recommendation. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo WH-C2

BEFORE

This photo was taken along Hill Avenue looking west towards the intersection of Hill Avenue and St. Augustine Road. There are utility lines, overhead signs, and road signs shown. The roadway has nothing to break up the continuous pavement between the east and west bound lanes.



Photo WH-C2

AFTER

This photo shows the same intersection with the utility lines removed. A grassed median has been added to divide the road into two distinct directions of traffic and add greenspace. The median shown is planted with small shrubs but could be planted with any type of vegetation.



Photo WH-C11

BEFORE

This photo shows a view of Hill Avenue looking east towards Downtown Valdosta. There are numerous overhead utility lines and poles. There is also one continuous field of pavement with nothing breaking up the east and west bound traffic.



Photo WH-C11

AFTER

This photo is of the same area of Hill Avenue looking towards Downtown Valdosta. Now, the utility lines and poles have been removed as well as some of the larger signs. A grassed median has also been added to divide the two lanes of traffic.

The following photos represent a second option for changes on Hill Avenue. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo WH-C8

BEFORE

This photo was taken along Hill Avenue looking east towards Downtown Valdosta. There are utility lines and road signs shown. The sidewalks are narrow and there is only a grassed curb to add any greenery to the roadway.



Photo WH-C8

AFTER

This photo shows the same section of Hill Avenue. Now, the utility lines have been removed. The sidewalks have been widened and there are flowers planted along the curbs incorporating a natural aspect to the Hill Avenue Corridor.



Photo WH-C18

BEFORE

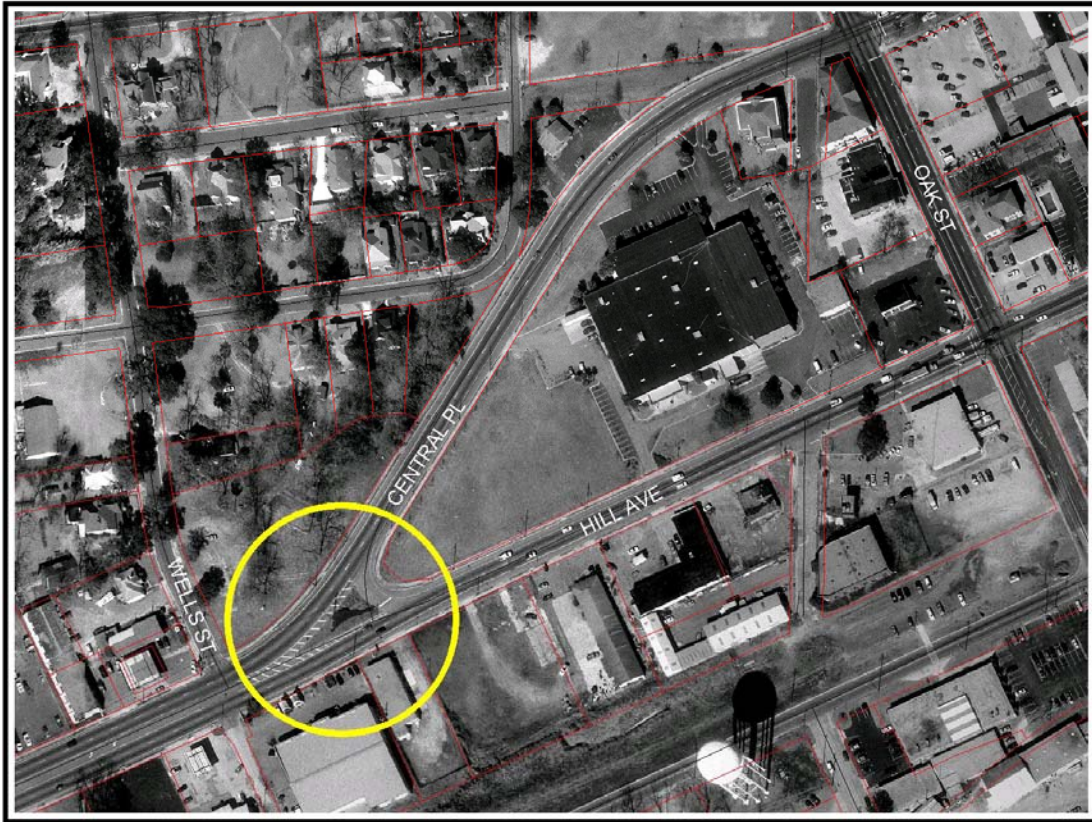
This photo shows a view of Hill Avenue looking east towards Downtown Valdosta. There are numerous overhead utility lines as well as poles and no extra natural features along the roadway.



Photo WH-C18

AFTER

This photo is of the same area of Hill Avenue looking towards Downtown Valdosta. Now, the utility lines and poles have been removed. The sidewalks have been widened and the curbs have flowers planted along them increasing the natural feel.



West Central Gateway —The circle represents the focus of this gateway. Recommendations will be targeted on the island in the center of the circle.

West Central

The West Central Gateway begins where the West Hill Avenue Gateway Corridor ends. This gateway could be incorporated into the West Hill Corridor or viewed as a stand alone area.

Traffic Count – traffic counts for the West Central Gateway area are listed at 9,400 trips per day from Wells Street to Oak Street along Hill Avenue. This number was at a high of 13,063 in 1996. After several years of decline, the DOT shows an increase from 2000 to 2001. There is a count of 9,046 trips per day at Central Place.

This would indicate approximately 18,446 daily trips occurring east and west through this potential gateway area along Hill Avenue and Central Place.

Code Enforcement – The West Central area saw four major categories of city violations. In particular, there were two instances of “doing business without a license”, six instances with “the maximum height of grass and weeds within 100 feet of buildings”, four instances with “the maximum height of weeds, grass, etc. within 150 feet of public ways or property of another”, and two instances of “vermin harborage.”

Landscaping – The area around West Central Avenue has an island where the roadway splits from two-way traffic to one-way traffic. This island has some low shrubs and planted grass. This location should be enhanced with additional shrubbery or plantings.

Signage – For the most part, the signage in this area is limited. The majority of the signs are for businesses along Hill Avenue. On the island itself, there are some traffic signs and a telephone pole. The island is a prime location for signage indicating an entrance into downtown Valdosta or noting the nearby historic areas.

Zoning – This section of town is zoned primarily C-H (Highway Commercial). This zoning is the most intense commercial zoning and allows all activities listed in the ordinance under *Business Uses* by right and only limits telecommunication towers and certain commercial amusement and recreation activities by special exception. It also allows for several light manufacturing uses.

One of the biggest problems from a zoning enforcement perspective is sign violations. This is a problem throughout the gateways in this study. The most common violations include temporary signs in the public right-of-way or on public structures such as telephone poles. These are primarily political signs, signs advertising sales, or similar signs.

Land Use – There is a mix of commercial uses in this area. Also, just off Hill Avenue to the north is the Fairview National Register Historic District. Even though the historic district is not connected or accessible from this area of Central Avenue, it should be considered in the overall evaluation. Since the historic district is visible from this

intersection, consideration should be taken to protect the Fairview Historic District from visual intrusion.

Even though the West Central Gateway is not in the National Register Historic District, it is part of the Valdosta Local Historic District. This needs to be taken into consideration when making any exterior changes in this area. The changes will need to meet any requirements set forth in the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines.

Recommendation – The West Central Gateway has the opportunity to be a predominant landmark within the City of Valdosta. With its location on Hill Avenue, it is seen by approximately 20,000 travelers on a daily basis. By increasing the landscaping in this area, burying the overhead utility lines, and adding some signage or a single predominant feature such as a sculpture or a fountain, this relatively insignificant traffic island could become a very significant landmark for Valdosta's growing downtown and the city itself.

The following photos show the West Central Gateway area at the end of the Hill Avenue Corridor. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo WC-1

BEFORE

This photo was taken along Hill Avenue looking towards Downtown Valdosta. The West Central Gateway area is in the foreground. There are numerous utility lines and poles overhead and in the photo.



Photo WC-1

AFTER

This is the same photo that has been altered. The utility lines and poles have been removed from the photo giving the observer a clear and unobstructed view into Downtown Valdosta.



Photo WC-2

BEFORE

This photo was taken of the West Central Gateway area from Hill Avenue looking east towards Downtown Valdosta. Both directions of traffic are visible from this photo. Also, there are numerous utility lines and poles in the photo obstructing the view into Downtown Valdosta.



Photo WC-2

AFTER

The same photo as before has been altered to show an increased median with some vegetation added and signage welcoming travelers to Valdosta. The utility lines and poles have been removed giving the observer a clear view into Downtown Valdosta.

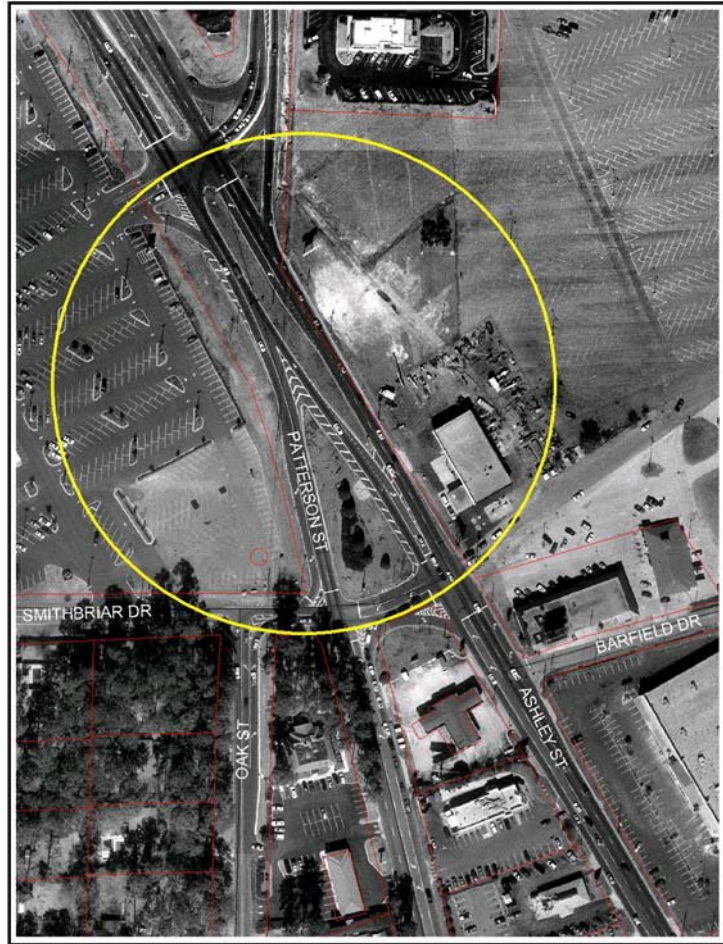
Five Points

The Five Points Gateway is located near the north end of town at the intersection of Patterson Street, Ashley Street, Oak Street, North Valdosta Road, and North Oak Street Extension. These five roads make up the Five Points Gateway. This area was once a major retail center in the City of Valdosta before the Valdosta Mall was built. After several years of decline, Five Points is seeing the resurgence of economic growth in recent years and has the ability to be a major retail center once again.

Traffic Count – DOT traffic information lists two different traffic counts for use near this area. One count is on Patterson Street from Eager Road to Smithbriar Drive, the other is on Ashley Street from Connell Road to Garden Drive. Patterson Street shows a count of 11,827 trips per day while Ashley Street lists 21,985 trips per day.

On two of the five major roads in this area, there is a total daily traffic count of 33,812. This number does not reflect a true total daily traffic flow through this intersection. Since there are five separate roads intersecting here, all five roads would need to have counts taken to get an accurate representation of the traffic flow in this area.

Code Enforcement – The Five Points Gateway area has been very good in terms of city code violations. There were no violations reported.



Aerial view of the Five Points Gateway. The main area of concentration is the island in the center of the yellow circle.

Landscaping – Landscaping in the Five Points area is adequate compared to some of the other areas of town. There are two islands providing greenery. One is a large planted island where Ashley Street, Patterson Street, North Valdosta Road, Oak Street, and Oak Street Extension converge and the other is a grassed median at the intersection of North Valdosta Road and North Oak Street Extension. The planted island has small bushes as well as larger magnolia trees and is privately maintained. The median is currently just grass, but has the potential of incorporating plants and trees.

There are also some large medians separating the north and south bound lanes along North Valdosta Road which are planted with crepe myrtles.

Signage – Signs around the Five Points Gateway area are, for the most part, non-distracting. Even though there are some visually detracting signs, the problem is not necessarily with business signs or off-premise signs (billboards). The main concern with signage at the Five Points Gateway is directional signs.

Since there are five different roadways converging on this single intersection, directional signs are very important to those people traveling through Five Points for the first time. There are overhead directional signs as well as roadside directional signs. Some of these roads are state routes and add to potential confusion in the area. There is also the added confusion with signage designating U.S. 41 and Interstate 75, both in close proximity to this intersection. The types of signs seem to be standard for the designated roadways, however some changes could be made with the city's roadway signs.

Zoning – Most of the property in this area is zoned for commercial use. There is a mix of C-C (Community Commercial), C-H (Highway Commercial), and C-N (Neighborhood Commercial). These zoning districts allow for a mix of commercial uses. They are the primary commercial districts in the zoning ordinance.

One of the biggest problems from a zoning enforcement perspective is sign violations. This is a problem throughout the gateways in this study. The most common violations include temporary signs in the public right-of-way or on public structures such as telephone poles. These are primarily political signs, signs advertising sales, or similar

signs.

Land Use – The land use in this area is primarily commercial. There are some established residential uses in close proximity, however none are directly affected by the commercial uses. Most of the uses are service oriented including banks, restaurants, car dealerships, and related shopping.

Recommendation – The Five Points Gateway area could be improved with minor changes. Since this is not the corporate boundary of the city limits, the standard, "Welcome to Valdosta" designation would not be appropriate. Instead, something more predominant that reflects the character of the city would be advised. Also, internally lit street signs may help alleviate problems navigating this intersection.

While the landscaping is in good condition, the potential for more remains. With the planted medians already in place along North Valdosta Road, increasing the amount of vegetation would be a simple way to bolster the positive visual impact of this gateway.

Like the West Hill Corridor, the overhead utilities have a major visual impact. If the opportunity to bury these utilities were available, it should be strongly considered. Burying these utilities would diminish the overall visual clutter and create a more appealing intersection.

One unique aspect that should be taken into consideration for the Five Points Gateway are the two State of Georgia designated bicycle routes running through this intersection (bicycle routes 10 & 15). Currently, there are no lanes to accommodate these bicycle routes. These routes could be used as an asset for the community as cycling and related activities become increasingly popular.

The following photos represent several different areas around the Five Points intersection. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo FP-1

BEFORE

This photo was taken from North Valdosta Road looking south at the planted island in the intersection of Ashley Street and Patterson Street. There are utility lines, overhead signs, and road signs shown. There are also large scale on-premise and off-premise signs. These numerous visual distractions that can overwhelm motorists.



Photo FP-1

AFTER

This photo shows the same intersection. Now, the utility lines and overhead signs have been removed along with the road signs and some of the larger off-premise signs. The view is unobstructed allowing motorists a safer drive through this already complex intersection.



Photo FP-2

BEFORE

This photo shows a view of Ashley Street (on the left) and Patterson Street, looking south at the grassed island. There are numerous overhead utility lines as well as poles.



Photo FP-2

AFTER

This photo is of the same area at the Five Points intersection. Now, the utility lines and poles have been removed as well as some of the larger signs. There are also flowers and shrubs added to the median.



Photo FP-3

BEFORE

This photo was taken looking north on North Valdosta Road from the Five Points intersection. There are utility lines in the distance that line the roadway. Also, there is a substantial median, however there is very little landscaping within it.



Photo FP-3

AFTER

This photo shows the same roadway. Now, the utility lines have been eliminated from the view. Also, the median has more plants added to increase the foliage in the area.



Photo FP-4

BEFORE

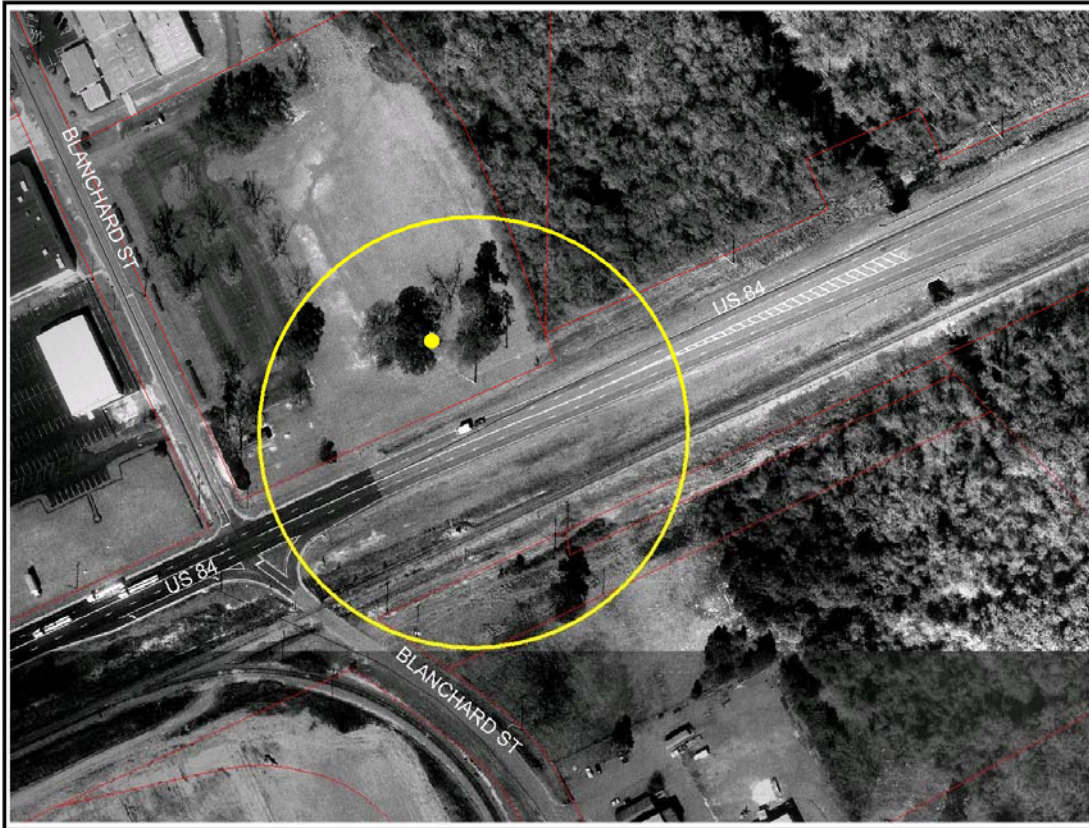
This photo shows a view of the Five Points intersection looking south on Ashley Street. There are numerous overhead utility lines as well as poles.



Photo FP-4

AFTER

This photo is of the same area at the Five Points intersection. Now, the utility lines and poles have been removed as well as some of the larger signs. Flowers have also been added to the median.



East Hill Gateway—The circle represents the focus of this gateway. The yellow dot indicates the current location of the City of Valdosta “welcome sign”.

East Hill

The East Hill Gateway is located at the eastern edge of the City of Valdosta. Several factors have led to this area's designation as a gateway. There is major industrial development to the south and this particular route is used by the vehicles serving those industries. East Hill Avenue is also U.S. Highway 84 and allows for easy access to Interstate 75. This location is also the first area people encounter when traveling west on U.S. 84 into the City of Valdosta, therefore this gateway has the potential of making a lasting impression.

Traffic Count – The traffic count for the East Hill Gateway is counted at 7,500 trips per day. This count was taken along East

Hill Avenue (U.S. Highway 84) from Douglas Street to Blanchard Street.

Code Enforcement – There were six violations of the city code that were reported at the East Hill Gateway. This consisted of five instances of “maximum height of weeds and grass within 150 feet of buildings, public ways, or property of another” and one violation for “vermin harborage.” These were the only violations reported.

Landscaping – The East Hill Gateway has limited landscaping. There is a grouping of trees on the north side of the roadway surrounding a sign identifying the City of Valdosta's eastern limit.

At the point where the sign is located, the

roadway converges to a four-lane road from a four-lane divided highway. The median dividing this highway is only planted with grass.

Signage – Signage at the East Hill Gateway area is limited. There is a sign denoting the beginning of the City of Valdosta’s limits, but it is off the road and surrounded by trees. It also appears to be weathering and looks run down. There are signs denoting the businesses along this roadway, but they are very simple and small in nature.

Zoning – The zoning around the East Hill Gateway is mixed. There is M-1 (Light Manufacturing), M-2 (Heavy Manufacturing) and R-15 (minimum 15,000 square foot residential lots). The M-1 and M-2 zoning districts allow for very intense uses and are typically found in industrial areas. The R-15 is used for large lot single-family residential areas with minimum lot sizes of just under one half acre.

One of the biggest problems from a zoning enforcement perspective is sign violations. This is a problem throughout the gateways in this study. The most common violations include temporary signs in the public right-of-way or on public structures such as telephone poles. These are primarily political signs, signs advertising sales, or similar signs.

Land Use – Since this area is on a major highway (U.S. 84) there are some intense land uses, most of which are industrial in nature. There is a packaging company, vacant land, and several industrial uses (chemical plants, manufacturing plants, etc.). Also, the Lowndes County Civic Center is near this location. With many events throughout the year, the civic center attracts people from around the south Georgia region increasing the exposure of this gateway.

Recommendation – The East Hill Gateway has the potential to be a prominent entrance into the City of Valdosta. The combination of one major roadway (Hill Avenue/ U.S. 84) that sees about 8,000 vehicles a day and minimal development disrupting the flow of traffic along the roadway can be used as an advantage when incorporating changes to this gateway.

One recommendation is to accentuate the sign denoting Valdosta’s City limits. The sign appears to be old and in need of an update. Also, the foliage surrounding the sign is growing to the point where it overshadows the sign itself, making the trees the predominant feature. Similarly, there is no sign denoting the exit from the City of Valdosta when traveling east on Hill Avenue. If a sign were placed in the eastbound lane, it could be used as both an exit sign and a second entrance sign.

Another way to utilize signage is by promoting Valdosta’s Historic Downtown. Since Hill Avenue runs directly through Downtown Valdosta and passes both the City Hall and County Courthouse, there is an opportunity to promote downtown as an attraction for passing motorists.

Landscaping in this gateway should be increased. There is a limited amount of flowering trees or bushes in this area. Adding more greenery is a simple way to increase the visibility of this gateway and make people realize they are entering the City of Valdosta.

The East Hill Gateway has several possibilities to increase its presence without overly increasing the maintenance requirements. This gateway could also serve as a natural transition leading into the East Central Gateway that will accentuate the Commercial Historic District.

The following photos represent several different views of the East Hill Gateway location. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo EH-1

BEFORE

This photo was taken on East Hill Avenue looking west. It is at the eastern city limits on Hill Avenue. There are several overhead utility lines in the photo. Also, in the distance is a sign indicating the Valdosta city limits. It is obstructed by trees and is hard to see.



Photo EH-1

AFTER

This photo shows the same location. In this photo, only the utility lines have been removed. This greatly improves the overall look of this area.



Photo EH-2

BEFORE

This photo shows a close-up of the city limits sign. It is dark and obstructed by overgrown trees. There are also some utility lines visible in the background.



Photo EH-2

AFTER

This photo shows a new city limits sign that has been brought out of the bushes and is more pronounced and visible. The utility lines have also been removed.



East Central Gateway —The circle represents the focus of this gateway location with Smith Park as an area of interest.

East Central

The East Central Gateway is a very important location within the City of Valdosta. It is where travelers begin to see the dense development pattern of Downtown Valdosta. This gateway is surrounded by commercial and residential uses. It is also the beginning of the Valdosta Local Historic District. It is anchored by a historic park and lends itself to a diversity of uses.

Traffic Count – The traffic counts for the East Central Gateway are listed at 8,094 daily trips from Lee Street to Jones Street along Hill Avenue. This indicates travel from west to east along the one-way portion of Hill Avenue.

Also, there is a count of 11,843 trips per day on Central Avenue from Jones Street to Forrest Street. This number reflects the trips heading east to west along this section of Central Avenue after the roadway becomes one-way traveling west into downtown. Therefore, a total of 19,937 trips pass through the East Central Gateway everyday.

Code Enforcement – There have been several city code violations in this location. The majority of the violations are for “maximum height of weeds and grass within 150 feet of buildings, public ways or property of another.” There were 23 such instances. Also noted were four instances of “vermin harborage” and one instance of a “pre-collection” violation.

Landscaping – Landscaping for this gateway takes on a different perspective because there is a city park located in the median area where Central Avenue and Hill Avenue split. Smith Park is an outstanding asset to this area. Not only does Smith Park provide a place for people to gather, it is a permanent area of greenspace. This however, only addresses part of the landscaping issue. There is a mix of land uses in this location that have existed for many years. Since most of the properties were developed before the City of Valdosta had a Tree and Landscape Ordinance, there is minimal landscaping on the properties.

Signage – The East Central Gateway has some minor issues with signage. There are several signs advertising the existing businesses and some directional signs to guide motorists. This includes both traffic signs and “points of interest” signs. There is signage giving direction to the Chamber of Commerce building, however it is small and similar in both size and color to the traffic signs. This causes the Chamber of Commerce sign to blend in with the surroundings. There are no signs indicating the Valdosta City Hall, the Lowndes County Courthouse or the boundaries of the Commercial Historic District.

There is one sign designating Smith Park. This sign is low to the ground and unique compared to the signs around it. However, there are traffic signs on either side of the Smith Park sign overshadowing it.

Zoning – This section of town is zoned primarily C-H (Highway Commercial). C-H is the most intense commercial zoning and allows all activities listed in the ordinance under *Business Uses* by right and only limits telecommunication towers and certain commercial amusement and recreation activities by special exception. It also allows

for several light manufacturing uses. There is a small area zoned R-P (Residential Professional) containing Smith Park.

One of the biggest problems from a zoning enforcement perspective is sign violations. This is a problem throughout the gateways in this study. The most common violations include temporary signs in the public right-of-way or on public structures such as telephone poles. These are primarily political signs, signs advertising sales, or similar signs.

Land Use – The land uses surrounding this gateway are mixed in nature. There are some businesses including gas stations, drug stores, laundromats, hair care establishments, as well as residential structures. One of the major land uses that will potentially benefit this area as a gateway is Smith Park. This park is located in a triangular parcel where Hill Avenue and Central Avenue split into one-way streets.

Since this is part of the Valdosta Local Historic District, there are some historic structures in or near this area. This needs to be taken into consideration when making any external changes. The changes will need to meet any requirements set forth in the Historic Preservation Design Guidelines.

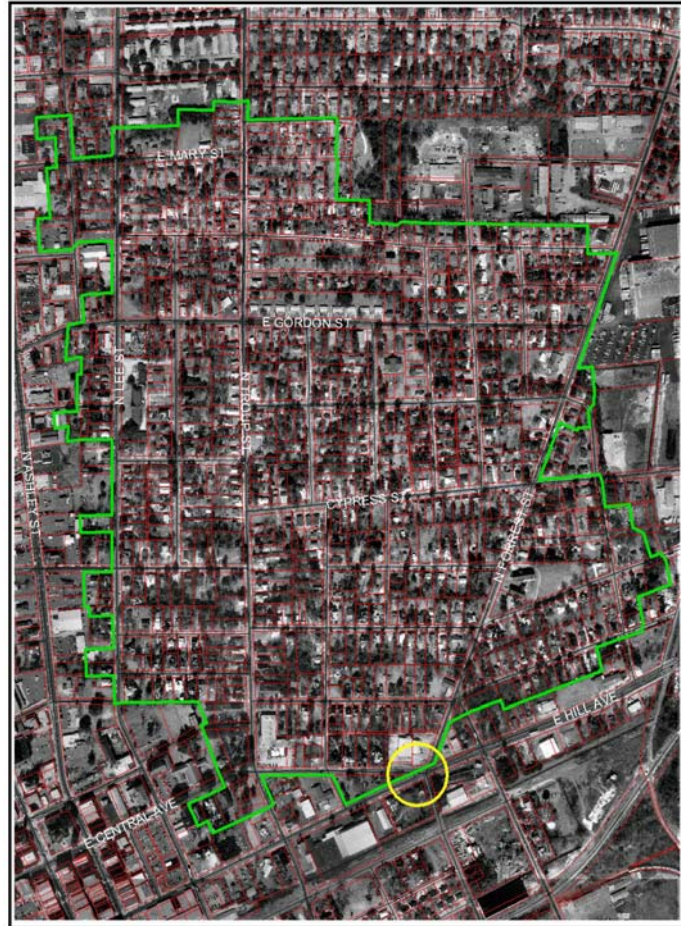
Along with being part of Valdosta’s local historic district, a portion of this area is being considered for a National Register Historic District to be known as the East End Historic District (*see map on page 30*). Currently, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources is finalizing the nomination to be submitted to the National Park Service. This potential designation could be an opportunity for the property owners to take advantage of Federal and State tax credit programs. These tax credit programs could allow property owners to freeze their

property taxes and receive an income tax credit while they preserve the integrity of this historic area.

Recommendation – The East Central Gateway is a heavily traveled intersection with direct access to Downtown Valdosta. Smith Park currently acts as an anchor for this gateway and should be utilized to its fullest potential. Efforts should be taken to make the park more accessible. Anyone wanting to use Smith Park is required to cross (at least) two lanes of single direction traffic. This can be dangerous depending on the time of day.

Also, the history of this location should be considered when examining this gateway. With some of the properties dating back as far as the 1860's, there is a significant historical impact. Smith Park, in fact, dates back to 1896 (originally named East End Park). Efforts should be taken to preserve this area and protect the significant housing resources vital to the sustainability of this historic location.

The East Central Gateway area has the potential of being both a transitional area into Downtown Valdosta and a way to protect and preserve part of the Local (and possibly National Register) Historic District. Currently, there are numerous overhead utility lines that obstruct the view in this area. These lines could be buried and the traffic signals could be replaced with more historically compatible traffic lights. Also, with only minor changes, some of the surrounding commercial buildings could better fit with the historic character of this location. Through the city's Façade Loan Program, some of these properties could incorporate



East End National Register Historic District—Proposed nomination area is depicted by the green outline . The yellow circle indicates the East Central Gateway.

awnings, lighting fixtures, or even paint colors to better suit the historic context.

Increased pedestrian facilities could improve this gateway. Since a mixture of commercial and residential uses dominates this area, some improvements for pedestrians could make the properties more accessible and reduce the need for automotive transportation. Improving the sidewalk surfaces and width to create a multi-use path would allow pedestrians and bicycles to share the sidewalks. Also, crosswalk improvements at the major intersections would provide more safety for pedestrians crossing this busy intersection.

The following photos represent several different views at the East Central Gateway location. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo EC-1

BEFORE

This photo was taken looking west where Hill Avenue and Central Avenue split. Smith Park is to the left of the view. There are numerous overhead lines and not much landscaping or greenery.



Photo EC-1

AFTER

Now, the utility lines have been taken out and the traffic signals replaced by the arm style lights. Also, plants have been added along the roadway edge and the sidewalks widened to increase pedestrian access.



Photo EC-2

BEFORE

A similar picture as above, however more of Smith Park and the Hill Avenue & Central Avenue split is visible. There are limited plantings, an abundance of overhead lines, and narrow sidewalks.



Photo EC-2

AFTER

The same intersection with the overhead lines removed and traffic signals changed. Some of the sidewalks have been widened and plants have been added to the roadsides increasing the greenery.



Photo EC-3

BEFORE

A close-up photo of Smith Park. The park has plentiful shade trees and open spaces. However, there are utility poles and traffic signs on the property. Also, the sign identifying Smith Park is small and not easily read.



Photo EC-3

AFTER

Once the utility poles and traffic signs are removed, the park seems more welcoming. A new sign has been incorporated identifying both Smith Park and the City of Valdosta's Historic District.

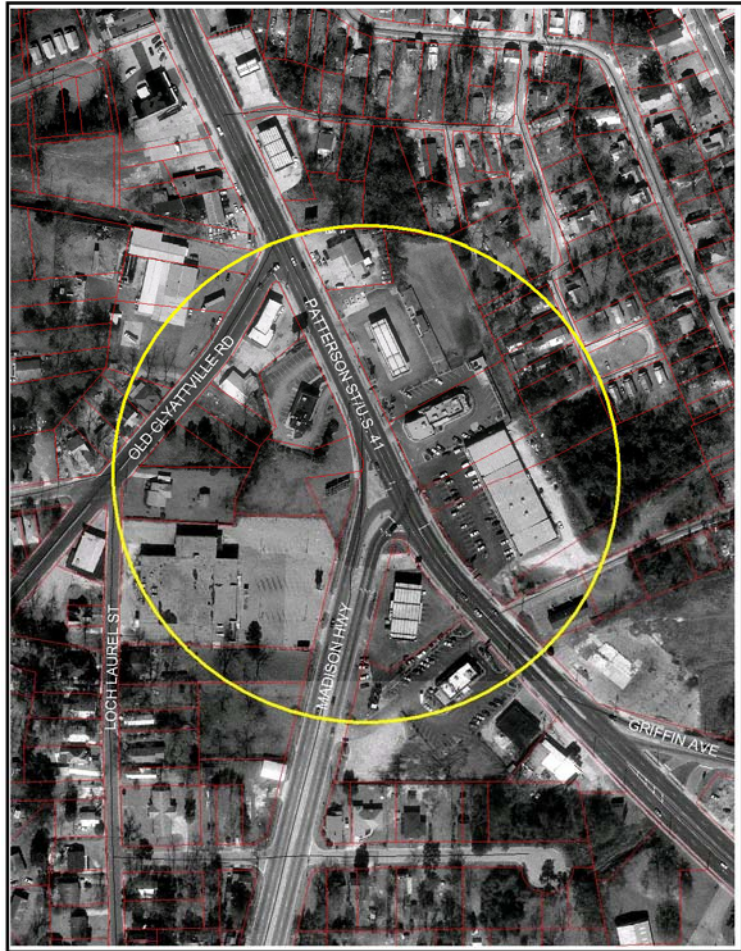
South Patterson

The South Patterson Gateway signifies the beginning of a main artery into Downtown Valdosta. Several heavily traveled roads merge with South Patterson Street giving this location more exposure than almost any other location in the City of Valdosta. The area is a mix of residential and commercial uses and is almost completely developed.

Traffic Count – The traffic counts for the South Patterson Gateway can be taken from two different DOT sites. One count, from Madison Highway to Old Clyattville Road, shows 28,639 trips per day. A second count, from Old Clyattville Road to the overpass shows 25,764 trips per day. This area is one of the most heavily traveled in the entire city according to the DOT traffic counts for 2001.

Code Enforcement – The South Patterson Gateway had very few instances of code violations. In particular, there were two citations for “maximum height of grass and weeds within 100 feet of buildings”, one instance of “noxious water in the streets”, and one sighting for “obstruction of drainage facilities.” For such a busy and heavily traveled section of town, this location is relatively free of city code violations.

Landscaping – In the South Patterson Gateway, there is very little landscaping present. Most of the existing landscaping is on indi-



Aerial view of the South Patterson Street Gateway with the main focus area in the yellow circle.

vidual properties. There are several areas where landscaping and additional green-space could be incorporated. In particular, there are two concrete islands that could be used as planted medians, one at the intersection of South Patterson Street and Madison Highway, and a second separating the traffic directions of U.S. 41 South.

Also, just north of this gateway area is the south end of the downtown overpass. There are several existing places around the overpass where landscaping would enhance the overall aesthetic. These areas are somewhat removed from the initial gateway location, however, a large majority of the traffic

passing through the South Patterson Gateway proceeds onto the overpass into Downtown Valdosta making this location viable for an increase in landscaping.

Signage – Signage in the South Patterson Gateway is fairly dense. There is a wide variety of signs in this area, including off-premise signs (billboards), temporary portable signs, and free standing business signs advertising the retail establishments along this roadway. Looking west from South Patterson Street on Madison Highway, there are a few off-premise signs. Most of the signs along this section of Madison Highway are directional signs or traffic control signs. Similarly, looking south on South Patterson Street (traveling away from Downtown Valdosta) there are very few signs that are not on premise signs. Most of the signage is for directional purposes and traffic control, or for advertising the existing businesses.

When traveling north on South Patterson street towards Valdosta, the change in signage is evident. The number of off-premise signs (billboards) increases dramatically. Leading up to, and even crossing the overpass into the downtown of Valdosta, the occurrence of these signs is very frequent. There are still a large number of on-premise signs for the existing businesses; however, the variety of sign types becomes denser in this area.

Zoning – The zoning for the South Patterson Gateway is exclusively C-H (Highway Commercial). This zoning is the most intense commercial zoning and allows all activities listed in the ordinance under *Business Uses* by right and only limits telecommunication towers and certain commercial amusement and recreation activities by special exception. It also allows for several

light manufacturing uses.

The C-H zoning, however, is very shallow along South Patterson Street. Immediately behind the C-H zoning is almost exclusively R-6 zoning. The R-6 (being a residential zoning classification) allows for single family and multi-family residential uses, as well as mobile homes by special exception.

The mix of the most intense commercial zoning and the most dense residential zoning is a very fragile balance. The residential neighborhoods abutting this commercial corridor are well defined areas that have existed for many years. It is important to protect these areas from any further encroachment of inappropriate zoning to ensure these residential areas will remain as such.

There were two specific zoning violations around this potential gateway. There is a business that does a mix of auto sale, auto repair, and a wrecker service. This particular business was sighted for operating a junkyard in an area not zoned for that use. The second violation dealt with a business that was discontinued and left a sign remaining on the structure instead of removing it. These were the only two zoning violations noted for this area.

Land Use – The land uses in this gateway are a mix of service oriented businesses (including auto repair and service stations) and general retail. This mix of land uses attracts consumers throughout the day. These commercial uses are primarily along South Patterson Street and the roads intersecting with South Patterson. Also in this area, is a large amount of residential land uses. These residential properties are not fronting South Patterson Street, however, they are all accessed from South Patterson.

This mix of land uses presents a unique situation and requires a delicate balance to both support the residential uses and protect them from becoming inundated with incompatible uses.

One step that has already been taken to help maintain the residential neighborhoods while promoting commercial growth was a major rezoning around downtown Valdosta. This area was historically industrial in nature. Over the years, residential growth started to occur, however the zoning was never changed to reflect this change in land use. In 2002 approximately 450 parcels and 136 acres of land were evaluated for compatibility with zoning and land use. In most cases, the zoning and land use didn't match. These properties were rezoned to reflect the appropriate zoning for the current use.

Recommendation – The South Patterson Gateway has a unique blend of commercial uses and residential uses. This commercial and residential mix has shown a history of compatibility which should be further encouraged.

The signs in this location are varied, however there is a lack of informational signs. For example, there is a sign indicating Valdosta State University but no signs on South Patterson Street indicating any of the downtown attractions or the location of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Site which is a prominent feature in this gateway.

Currently, the City of Valdosta has a newly designated project to revitalize the Martin Luther King Jr. Drive Corridor, including the memorial site. This project will potentially involve increased landscaping and pedestrian facilities while increasing the size of the memorial site. Since one of the major points of access to the Martin Luther

King Jr. Drive corridor is through the South Patterson Street Gateway, the potential exists for reviewing the South Patterson Gateway as a corridor. Extending this gateway into a corridor would allow for additional improvements to be made in the area.

The following photos represent different views of the South Patterson Gateway location. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo SP-1

BEFORE

This photo was taken on South Patterson Street looking north. The concrete median is being used for traffic separation on U.S. 41. There is not much greenery in the area and the utility lines are obvious in the background.



Photo SP-1

AFTER

This photo shows the same location. The utility lines have been removed and the median is now planted with different shrubs and bushes adding to the overall appeal of the area.



Photo SP-2

BEFORE

This photo shows a close-up of a concrete median separating the traffic entering South Patterson Street from Madison Highway.



Photo SP-2

AFTER

Now, the median in the foreground is grassed and planted with low shrubs and flowers. The median in the background incorporates trees and flowers. Also, the utility lines and poles have been removed.



Photo SP-3

BEFORE

This photo shows South Patterson Street looking north at the overpass into downtown. There are numerous utility lines and poles obstructing the overall view.



Photo SP-3

AFTER

The same photo with the utility lines and poles removed. Also, low ground cover has been added on the edge of the road showing how simple plants can improve the visual impact of an area.

North Patterson

The North Patterson Gateway is one of the main entrances into Downtown Valdosta. It is located at the transition between a one-way street and a two-way street. Since it is located just north of the main downtown core, it lacks some of the added amenities of Downtown Valdosta. This location has the potential of presenting people an up-close view of downtown Valdosta.

Traffic Count – The daily traffic count for the North Patterson Gateway is listed at 16,473. This count was taken along Patterson Street from Magnolia Street to Valley Street. This number represents the total traffic traveling south on Patterson Street into Downtown Valdosta.

Code Enforcement – The North Patterson Gateway has seen relatively few violations of the city codes. There were five violations at this location for “maximum height of weeds and grass within 150 feet of buildings, public ways, or property of another”. Also, there were two violations for “vermin harborage.” These were the only instances of city code violations.

Landscaping – Approaching the North Patterson Gateway location, there is very little landscaping. There is a narrow grass median between the street and the sidewalk with several trees planted in it. However, after crossing Magnolia Street and entering the core downtown area, the landscaping begins to improve.



Aerial view of the North Patterson Street Gateway with the main focus area in the yellow circle.

Several years ago, downtown Valdosta underwent a complete streetscape revitalization. This was accomplished with assistance from the Georgia Department of Transportation–Transportation Enhancement Funds and local dollars. This streetscape plan has dramatically improved this area and all of downtown.

Signage – There are very few signs in the North Patterson Gateway. The primary sign type seen in the North Patterson Gateway is for traffic management. There are several route markers for state and local routes, as well as speed limit signs. After crossing

Magnolia Street, there are banners hanging from the downtown streetlights, but there are few signs for the businesses that are oriented to be viewed from the roadway.

Zoning – The zoning in this proposed gateway area is C-D (Downtown Commercial). This zoning classification is used for the downtown area to promote a higher density of uses. It also allows for both commercial and residential uses. There is also some C-H (Highway Commercial) and C-C (Community Commercial).

The C-H zoning is the most intense commercial zoning and allows all activities listed in the ordinance under *Business Uses* by right and only limits telecommunication towers and certain commercial amusement and recreation activities by special exception. It also allows for several light manufacturing uses. The C-C zoning is very similar to the C-H, however, it is not as intense and has more limitations on acceptable land uses.

One of the biggest problems from a zoning enforcement perspective is sign violations. This is a problem throughout the gateways in this study. The most common violations include temporary signs in the public right-of-way or on public structures such as telephone poles. These are primarily political signs, signs advertising sales, or similar signs.

Land Use – There is a mix of land uses around the North Patterson Gateway. The U.S. Post Office and Federal Building, a church, a car dealership, a restaurant, and some retail shops can be found. This particular gateway is on the north end of the Central Valdosta Development Authority boundary and is located within a local historic district.

Since this is part of the Valdosta Local Historic District, there are some historic structures in or near this area. This needs to be taken into consideration when making any exterior changes. Alterations will need to meet any requirements set forth in the Historic Preservation Design Review Guidelines.

Recommendation – The North Patterson Gateway is unique because it is a transitional segment entering into downtown Valdosta. At this gateway, Patterson Street becomes a one way road for southbound traffic and continues through downtown. This marks a distinct separation between the downtown area and “the rest” of Valdosta. Not only is the landscaping increased, but the signage increases as well.

Since this separation already exists, it should be emphasized to mark the transition into downtown. For example, the signs for downtown adorning the streetlights are not very bold and powerful. These signs tend to blend in with the surrounding foliage. Similarly, there are no signs marking the entrance into downtown Valdosta. Since downtown is becoming a prominent location to live, shop, work, and recreate, signage should be a major part of the viewshed in this gateway.

Naturally complementing signage is landscaping. The landscaping in this area could be improved. After crossing Magnolia Street, traveling southbound, the landscaping improves dramatically. However, the portion leading up to Magnolia Street should be upgraded. Incorporating a landscape island would mark a definitive transition into downtown and add to the overall aesthetics.

Finally, since Patterson Street is a major route into downtown Valdosta, it is also a major viewshed for downtown. One element that detracts from this viewshed is the overhead utility lines. There are many landmark buildings in downtown including the Lowndes County Courthouse. The views of these buildings are interrupted by the utilities lines. It would be beneficial to bury these utility lines and also incorporate different traffic signals that would add to the overall character of "Historic Downtown Valdosta."

The following photos are of the North Patterson Gateway. The photo on top shows North Patterson Street as it looks today. The bottom picture incorporates some of the recommendations of the Gateway study.



Photo NP-1

BEFORE

This photo shows North Patterson Street looking south into downtown Valdosta. The overhead utility lines interrupt the view and the lack of greenspace north of Magnolia Street is evident.



Photo NP-1

AFTER

The same photo showing the overhead utility lines removed. Also, a new landscape island has been added to break-up the expanse of concrete roadway. Flowers have also been added to the existing sidewalks and a sign indicates "Downtown Valdosta."

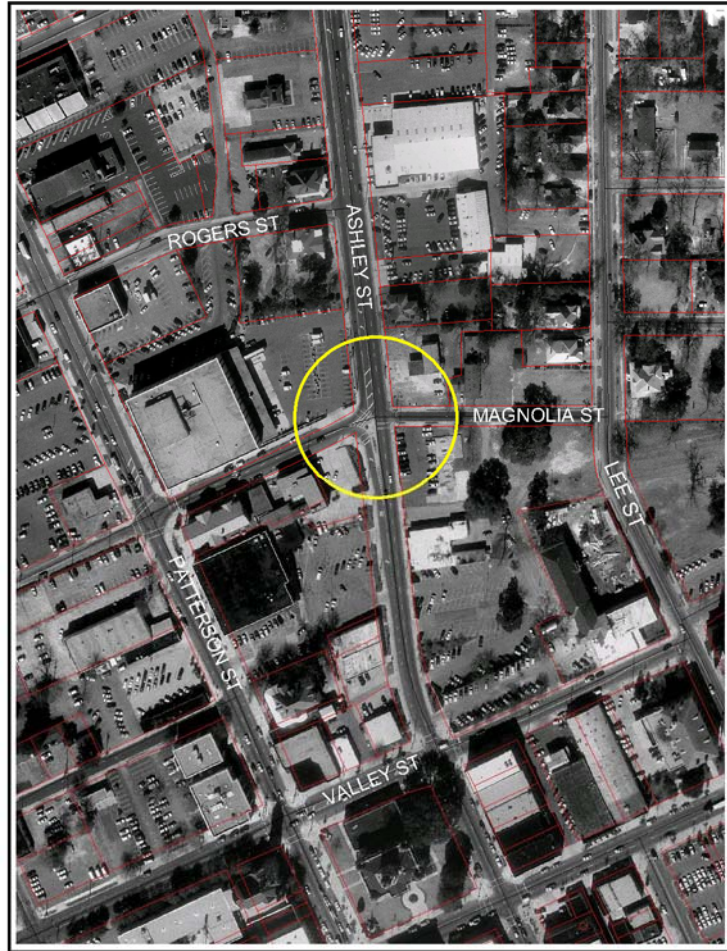
North Ashley

Similar to the North Patterson Gateway is the North Ashley Gateway. In some respects, the two are extensions of one another. North Ashley Street is a one-way street for northbound traffic traveling through downtown Valdosta. Southbound traffic flows along Ashley Street only to Magnolia Street where it is forced to travel west to Patterson Street, thus encountering the North Patterson Gateway.

Traffic Count – The daily traffic count for the North Ashley Gateway is listed at 13,907 trips per day. This count was taken on Ashley Street from Valley Street to Magnolia Street. This number represents the daily trips on Ashley Street heading north through Downtown Valdosta.

Code Enforcement – The North Ashley Gateway location has been excellent from a city code perspective. Over the last several years there have been no violations.

Landscaping – Like the North Patterson Gateway, North Ashley has minimal landscaping. When traveling south on Ashley Street, leading up to Magnolia Street, there is only a small grassed strip between the street edge and the sidewalk. However, there are some sections lacking this minimal grassed area. At Magnolia Street, there is a small landscaped island in the middle of the roadway. Once at the intersection of Ashley Street and Magnolia Street, all southbound traffic on Ashley Street is di-



Aerial view of the North Ashley Street Gateway with the main focus area in the yellow circle.

rected to turn and proceed west on Magnolia Street.

Similar to Patterson Street, the landscaping improves dramatically south of Magnolia Street. The Ashley Street corridor was also included in the streetscape revitalization plan that occurred in downtown Valdosta. In this case, however, Ashley Street is one-way for northbound traffic up to the intersection with Magnolia Street so traffic moving south on Ashley turn before entering the landscaped corridor.

Signage – The signs in the North Ashley Gateway are well controlled. There are

mostly directional signs for traffic and signs for the local businesses. Since this gateway is in the Valdosta Local Historic District, most of the signs are small in scale. Also, off-premise advertising is not present in this area.

Zoning – The zoning for this gateway on Ashley Street is C-D (Downtown Commercial). This zoning classification is used for the downtown area to promote a higher density of uses. It also allows for a mix of both commercial and residential uses.

This location also contains C-C (Community Commercial) zoning. The C-C zoning is a medium intensity commercial zoning district allowing for commercial uses that are lower impact, such as flower shops, farmers markets, drug stores, offices, and similar uses.

One of the biggest problems from a zoning enforcement perspective is sign violations. This is a problem throughout the gateways in this study. The most common violations include temporary signs in the public right-of-way or on public structures such as telephone poles. These are primarily political signs, signs advertising sales, or similar signs.

Land Use – Similar to the North Patterson Gateway, there is a mix of uses in the area. The U.S. Post Office and Federal offices are located here, as well as car dealerships, general commercial uses, and the Valdosta/Lowndes Chamber of Commerce. Since the chamber plays a major role in recruiting businesses and acquainting people to the Greater Valdosta area, efforts should be taken to assure a lasting positive impression when people visit the chamber building. This gateway also borders on the Central Valdosta Development Authority

boundary and is located within a local historic district.

Since this is part of the Valdosta Local Historic District, there are some historic structures in or near this area. This needs to be taken into consideration when making any exterior changes. The alterations will need to meet any requirements set forth in the Historic Preservation Design Review Guidelines.

Recommendation – The North Ashley Gateway is very similar to the North Patterson Gateway. In fact, traffic moving south on Ashley Street is directed through the North Patterson Gateway. This traffic pattern should play an important part in the potential improvements to the North Ashley Gateway. The current land uses and zoning seem to be appropriate for this area. However, the landscaping and signage should be increased and enhanced to make this gateway more visually attractive.

The section of Magnolia Street connecting Ashley Street and Patterson Street should be a focus for increased landscaping and signage. This is a one-way directional road with the potential to become a dramatic feature for travelers entering Downtown Valdosta Street lights and banners matching those in downtown Valdosta already exist, however, the landscaping is not as pronounced.

Trees could be added on both sides of the street to enhance the fact that Valdosta is a designated “Tree City USA.” In addition to the trees, the sidewalks could be widened and plantings added along the sides of the street to enhance the overall aesthetics. Similarly, the small island that helps guide traffic onto Magnolia Street could be upgraded in terms of both size and landscaping.

From a signage perspective, there is a sign directing people to Valdosta State University, however there are no signs designating the entrance into “Historic Downtown Valdosta.” The small landscape island at the intersection of Ashley Street and Magnolia Street should be used to promote downtown Valdosta.

Like the North Patterson Gateway, the banner signs on the street lights seem to be worn and the colors make the banners difficult to read at certain times of the day.

As with most of the gateway areas, the utility lines directly impact the viewshed of travelers proceeding south on Ashley Street. The Ashley Street corridor provides one of the most dramatic views of the Lowndes County Courthouse; however, this view is obstructed by the overhead utility lines. Any opportunity to place these utility lines underground should be pursued. This investment would provide a lasting visual improvement for this area.

The following photos represent different views of the North Ashley Gateway location. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo NA-1

BEFORE

This photo shows a view of North Ashley Street looking south into downtown Valdosta. The view of the Lowndes County Courthouse is obstructed by the utility lines. Similarly, there is little greenery north of Magnolia Street. Also, the small island directing traffic west onto Magnolia Street is present.



Photo NA-1

AFTER

The utility lines have been removed allowing a clear view of the Lowndes County Courthouse. Also, a new median has been added with various trees, flowers, and small shrubs. A new sign indicating the entrance into downtown has been added.



Photo NA-2

BEFORE

This photo shows the section of Magnolia Street used for southbound traffic on Ashley Street. There is minimal landscaping and greenery along the sides of this corridor.



Photo NA-2

AFTER

The Magnolia Street corridor has been embellished with new trees and plants. Also, a median helps calm traffic entering this area. Similarly, the utility lines have been removed to open up the view.



Industrial Boulevard West Gateway—The circle represents the focus of this gateway location . The yellow dot indicates the location of the existing sign denoting the Valdosta City Limits.

Industrial Boulevard West

Located near the industrial parks on the south end of Valdosta is the Industrial Boulevard West Gateway. This gateway is the intersection of Gil Harbin Industrial Boulevard and Madison Highway (U.S. 31). This corridor experiences traffic associated with the industrial park as well as people traveling north and south through Valdosta. It is also a southern point for the Valdosta city limits.

Traffic Count – There are two different counts that could be used for this gateway, both traveling along Madison Highway. The first count is from James P. Rodgers

Circle to Highland Drive. The DOT lists a daily traffic count of 12,832 trips. The second count is from Smith Avenue to the Georgia Southern & Florida Railroad line with a total daily traffic count of 13,731 trips.

Code Enforcement – The Industrial Boulevard West Gateway has seen very few violations of the city’s codes. In particular, there were two instances of “persons doing business without a license” and one instance of “maximum height of grass and weeds within 100 feet of a building.” These were the only incidents reported for this gateway.

Landscaping – This particular gateway has

very little maintained landscaping. There is a sign welcoming travelers to Valdosta, however it is almost completely covered with trees. There is a large stand of trees or bushes that seem to be overgrown and could potentially cover the entire sign. Also, there is not much color in the existing plants. Most of the vegetation in this location is green or only blooms for a short period of time. There is ample room to incorporate more plantings in this area and efforts should be taken to utilize this space.

Signage – The signs in the Industrial Boulevard West Gateway are primarily for businesses in the area. There are only a handful of signs in and around this location. Since this is the intersection of Madison Highway (U.S. 31) and Gil Harbin Industrial Boulevard, the majority of property is used for industrial purposes and therefore extensive signage is not required.

There is however, a sign designating the city limits and welcoming travelers into the City of Valdosta. This sign is set off the roadway and is faded making it difficult to read. Also, there is a large stand of trees behind this sign causing it to blend in with the surroundings. The only other signs in the area are directional and traffic control signs. There are no signs identifying points of interest or significant features.

Zoning – The zoning is almost exclusively M-2 (Heavy Manufacturing). Since this particular gateway is located around Gil Harbin Industrial Boulevard, it is fitting that the zoning is mostly designated for manufacturing or industrial uses. There is however, one parcel zoned R-10 (10,000 square foot minimum residential lot). This lot has a single-family residential unit located on it.

One of the biggest problems from a zoning

code perspective is sign violations. Most of what is reported or identified are temporary signs in the public right-of-way or on public structures like telephone poles. These are primarily political signs, signs advertising sales, or signs of that nature.

Land Use – The land uses are primarily industrial in nature. There is the Pepsi Cola Distribution Center, the Maxum Marine plant, Southern Contractors Supply Outlet, and the T.M. Polyfilm plant to name a few. There is a residential neighborhood just southeast of this area, however it is not very large (approximately 80 lots) and is surrounded by vacant land. This neighborhood extends east from Madison Highway with approximately 12 lots fronting the highway.

Recommendation – The Industrial Boulevard West Gateway is a relatively uninterrupted area. The main thoroughfare, Madison Highway (U.S. 31), provides access to both Interstate 75 and a direct link to downtown Valdosta. However, since approximately 15,000 vehicles travel through this gateway, it is a heavily traveled route with high visibility, making this an important gateway.

Signage and landscaping are lacking and both have the potential to be dramatic features for this gateway. In particular, the sign currently designating the entrance into the City of Valdosta is weathered and the colors are not dramatic enough to attract attention. The sign is also set too far from the roadway which diminishes the impact it has on passersby.

The landscaping may also be improved to make this a memorable gateway. Ample space exists around the current sign to allow for an increase in the landscaping. In addition, as with the East Hill Gateway, the

trees and shrubs around the sign should either be removed or trimmed to make the sign the focal point instead of the landscaping.

As with all the other gateway areas, the overhead utility lines have a major impact on the viewshed of travelers. The view is obstructed by the overhead utility lines. Any opportunity to place these utility lines underground should be pursued.

The following photos represent different views of the Industrial Boulevard West Gateway. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo IBW-1

BEFORE

This photo was taken from Madison Highway looking north towards the City of Valdosta. On the right side is the existing City of Valdosta sign almost obscured by a utility pole. Similarly, there are utility lines overhead, and very little landscaping.



Photo IBW-1

AFTER

The same photo with the utility poles and lines removed. The traffic signals have been replaced causing less visual impact on the area. A new sign and landscaped median have been added creating a more dramatic statement for this entrance to the City of Valdosta.



Photo IBW-2

BEFORE

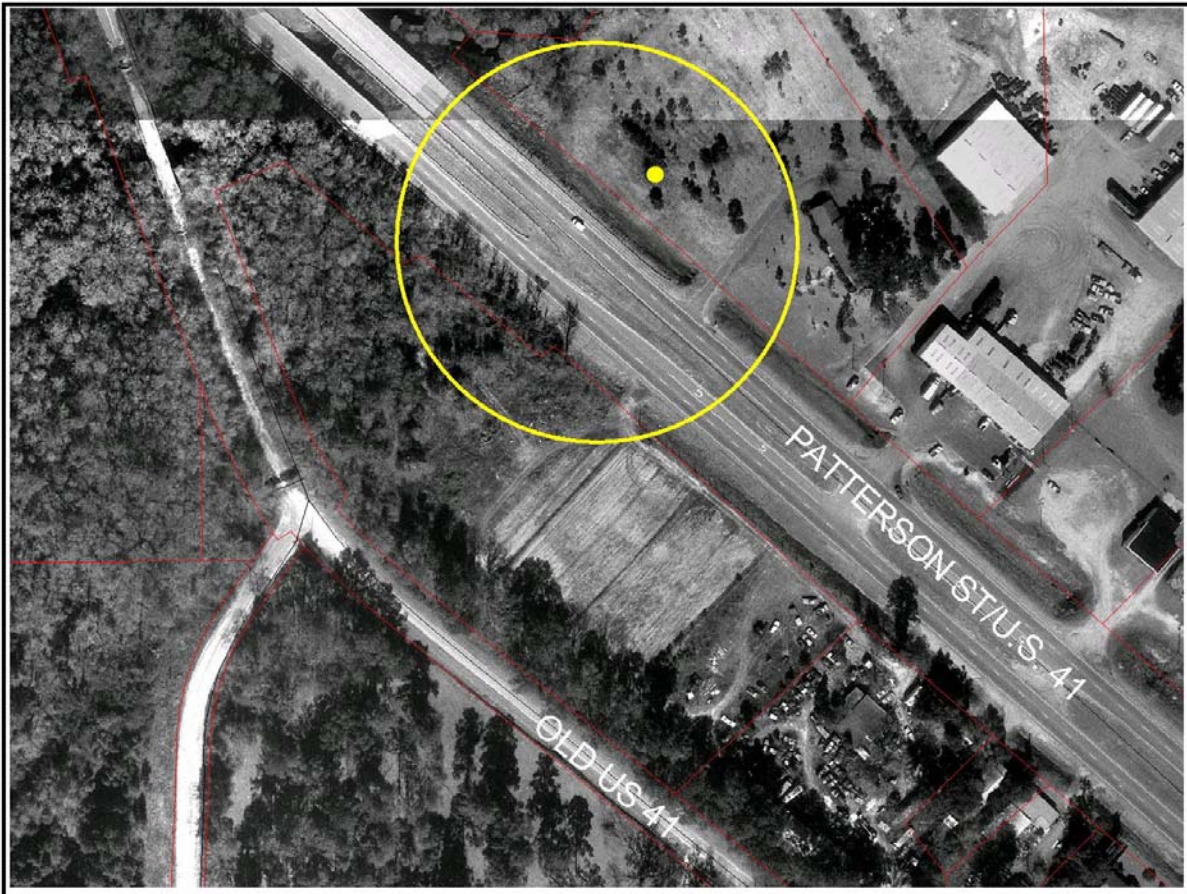
With the above photos being one option, this photo is a close-up of the exiting city limits sign. There is little color in the plants and the sign seems to blend in with the surrounding landscaping.



Photo IBW-2

AFTER

A new sign has been placed in the existing location. Plants have been added to depict the variety of colors landscaping that could be available.



Industrial Boulevard East Gateway —The circle represents the focus of this location . The yellow dot indicates the location of the existing sign denoting the Valdosta City Limits.

Industrial Boulevard East

Like the Industrial Boulevard West Gateway, the Industrial Boulevard East Gateway is a southern point of the Valdosta city limits. However, this gateway is farther south from Gil Harbin Industrial Boulevard than the Industrial Boulevard West Gateway. Located on South Patterson Street (U.S. 41), the Industrial Boulevard East Gateway precedes the South Patterson Gateway.

Traffic Count – The traffic count for this gateway is listed by the DOT at 9,287 trips per day. This count was taken between Collins Avenue and Pendleton Avenue. The count location is a little further north on

Patterson Street than the gateway location, however it is the closest count that was available.

Code Enforcement – The Industrial Boulevard East Gateway has been excellent from a city code perspective. There have been no reported violations of the city codes at this location within the past several years.

Landscaping – The Industrial Boulevard East Gateway has landscaping surrounding a sign welcoming travelers into the City of Valdosta. The landscaping consists primarily of pine trees, several palm trees, and various bushes and shrubs. The entire area is surrounded by grass and immediately be-

hind this location is Mud Creek. The different types of vegetation in this area remain green for most of the year and do not add much color.

Signage – Similar to the Industrial Boulevard West Gateway, this location has a sign welcoming travelers into the City of Valdosta. The sign is similar to the one located at both the Industrial Boulevard West Gateway and the East Hill Gateway. The sign is set off the roadway and is surrounded by trees and shrubbery. The sign colors blend in with the vegetation and can sometimes be difficult to see in regards to the color and the location.

Zoning – The zoning along this part of South Patterson Street is a mixture of C-H (Highway Commercial) and R-10 (10,000 square foot minimum residential lots). The C-H zoning is the most intense commercial zoning and allows all activities listed in the ordinance under *Business Uses* by right and only limits telecommunication towers and certain commercial amusement and recreation activities by special exception. It also allows for several light manufacturing uses.

One of the biggest problems from a zoning code perspective is sign violations. Most of what is reported or identified are temporary signs in the public right-of-way or on public structures like telephone poles. These are primarily political signs, signs advertising sales, or signs of that nature.

Land Use – The land uses consist of undeveloped land and commercial uses. Some of these uses include an equipment rental facility, a car dealership, a siding facility, a natural gas dealership, and a feed store. These uses are primarily on the west side of Patterson Street. On the east side of Patterson Street is mostly private, undeveloped land

with a large pond. This area has the potential for future development.

Recommendation – The Industrial Boulevard East Gateway is unique because a large vacant grassed median already exists. The signage should be upgraded and moved into the center median making it more visible to travelers entering Valdosta. Also, the landscaping could be increased in the median.

Similarly, the Industrial Boulevard Gateway has the potential to be one of the more visible entrances into Valdosta. It could include signage or announcements for the historic areas, Valdosta State University, notification of civic organizations, or accolades the city has received over the years.

An element that has not been discussed in previous gateway areas is lighting. In this particular gateway, lighting should be incorporated to accentuate new signage and landscaping. Because this is a more rural area, lighting would not adversely impact the few residential uses nearby. Incorporating lights into this gateway would give travelers a sense of place and direction when entering into the City of Valdosta.

The following photos represent different views of the Industrial Boulevard East Gateway location. On the left side is the original photo. On the right side is the same photo that has been altered to reflect some of the recommendations.



Photo IBE-1

BEFORE

This photo shows the existing corridor leading up to Industrial Boulevard. The photo is taken from U.S. Highway 41 looking north into the City of Valdosta. There is a wide grassed median, however the existing city limits sign is located in the distance on the right side.



Photo IBE-1

AFTER

The same view now has a city limits sign in the center of the median where it is more visible. Minimal plantings are used to accentuate the existing grassed median.



Photo IBE-2

BEFORE

As indicated in the recommendation, this sign could incorporate lighting since the location is rural. This picture shows how a new sign would look in daylight conditions.



Photo IBE-2

AFTER

At night, this sign would be illuminated making it a more dramatic feature in the evening hours. Travelers would easily notice they are entering the City of Valdosta.

SUMMARY

The City of Valdosta has many different gateways into the city and into downtown. These areas could add to the city's overall identity by becoming focal points for the city. In almost every gateway, there are similar solutions to solving the existing problems.

Landscaping and signage are two key components to improving the gateway locations. When a clear symbol marks the transition from one area to another, people develop a sense of place. Both signage and landscaping help define those boundaries and give the citizens a clear idea of where they are.

another element unique to the City of Valdosta gateways are overhead utility lines. The City of Valdosta has some spectacular viewsheds, however, many are impeded by the overhead utility lines. Moving the utility lines underground is not an easy solution, however, as demonstrated by the before and after pictures, it will have a dramatic affect on the visual impressions of the area.

Many different funding opportunities are available for these gateway projects. Local funds may be used to fully fund these projects or serve as leverage for grant dollars. After the city determines what specific projects it would like to pursue staff will determine what grants might be available to help pay for the improvements.

Pending final acceptance of this study, construction estimates for each gateway, and prioritizing of the gateways, staff will begin researching any grant opportunities that may be utilized to fund these improvements.