

Investing in downtown will pay off

[Rick Hohlt](#), *Publisher*

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Ruston leaders, business owners and residents continue to study how to improve the downtown area, and the city stands to benefit from their time and effort.

Ruston 21 — a comprehensive master plan for the city launched in 2008 — is steadily gaining ground as officials and consultants solicit feedback from local residents and develop a plan for Ruston's future growth and development.

The most recent piece of the plan took place this week, when approximately 15 downtown merchants and investors met with representatives from Sasaki Associates, an international planning and design firm. The group discussed the positive aspects of Ruston's downtown, as well as ideas for solving problems and drumming up more business.

Since the downtown is one of Ruston's signatures and an area of pride for most residents, it is wise for the city to invest in not only maintaining its attractiveness, but also working to improve it.

Projects like the downtown revitalization that is under way now, which will realign sidewalks and bury power lines, are a good first step toward beautifying the area and making it more pedestrian-friendly. The question is what to do next downtown that will attract not only those who already appreciate its uniqueness, but also draw in new and different people.

After talking with those who attended Tuesday's meeting, consultant Ricardo Dumont said it appears the downtown area would benefit from enhancing its appeal to the market for ages 22-29-year-olds and expanding housing options to bring more residents to live in that area of the city.

That's no simple task, but it is a necessary one if we want to make downtown thrive. Other areas of concern mentioned during the meeting included available parking in some areas and the train whistle, in addition to recent focus by the city on developments on the north side of town.

No doubt, there are solutions or compromises for all of these issues; it will just take dedication and effort from stakeholders. So far, it seems the interest in improving downtown is there. Now it's just a matter of firming up a plan and taking action.

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