



WALTERBORO STRATEGIC PLAN

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

July 14, 2025



Walterboro®
The Front Porch of the Lowcountry



INTRODUCTION

The South Carolina Department of Commerce (SCDC) has launched a transformative Strategic Planning Initiative as part of its broader Rural Development Program. Building on the foundation of the Targeted Rural Strategies and Growing Rural Communities Grant programs, this initiative demonstrates a strengthened and expanded commitment to South Carolina's Tier III and Tier IV counties. With support from the Coordinating Council for Economic Development, SCDC designed this effort to tackle the complex challenges rural communities face while identifying opportunities to strengthen local economies, improve quality of life, and position these areas for long-term success.

At the heart of the initiative, communities will develop strategic economic development plans that identify catalyst projects. These are priority investments and initiatives with the power to spark broader revitalization. These plans address key drivers of rural prosperity, including housing, transportation, infrastructure, tourism, business recruitment, land use, arts and culture, and community services. By combining local insight with expert guidance, the initiative will produce clear, actionable roadmaps that help communities build on their strengths, attract sustainable growth, and pursue a bold vision for a more vibrant and resilient rural South Carolina.

SCDC selected Walterboro, South Carolina, to participate in the initiative because of its strategic location along I-95, its rich cultural and environmental assets, and its potential to grow its downtown economy. As the county seat of Colleton County and home to approximately 5,400 residents, Walterboro plays a vital role in the region. Each year, thousands of visitors stop off the interstate, explore the ACE Basin, attend local events, or visit the Walterboro Wildlife Center. These steady visitor flows create strong opportunities to boost local economic activity, support small businesses, and reinvigorate the downtown core.

This planning effort builds on current investments in infrastructure, public facilities, and small business growth. It aims to better connect Walterboro's visitors to its downtown by identifying catalytic projects that activate underutilized properties, improve public spaces, and create a more walkable environment. The plan seeks to encourage longer stays, increase local spending, and generate repeat visitation. With strong local leadership, deep community pride, and a renewed focus on regional tourism, Walterboro stands ready to strengthen its economic foundation and deliver lasting value to both residents and visitors.





SCOPE

The Walterboro Strategic Plan focuses on the revitalization and enhancement of the city's historic downtown, while also leveraging recent and upcoming infrastructure investments, particularly in water and sewer capacity to spur commerce at Walterboro's Interstate 95 gateways, and wayfinding signage to get traffic into downtown, to fuel Walterboro's economic engine. With a renewed commitment to downtown through participation in the Main Street SC program and the addition of a dedicated Main Street and Tourism Director, the city recognized a critical opportunity to build momentum for economic development, placemaking, and community vibrancy.

This planning effort was designed to:

- Establish a clear and actionable vision for downtown Walterboro;
- Identify a catalytic project that can serve as a visible, early success;
- Align public investment and policy decisions with long-term revitalization goals;
- Leverage infrastructure improvements, such as the expansion of sewer capacity near Exit 57 and the industrial mega site, to support coordinated growth.

The planning process emphasized community engagement, strategic analysis, and implementation readiness. A multi-disciplinary team led by BOUDREAUX worked in close partnership with city staff, elected officials, stakeholders, and the public over a four-phase process that included:

Phase 1: Discovery and Community Input – The team visited Walterboro for an in-depth discovery phase, including tours of the city and surrounding growth areas, stakeholder interviews, and public engagement.

Phase 2: Vision and Framework Development – Based on community input and findings from Phase 1, the team developed a downtown-focused strategic vision and framework, including recommended goals and strategies, guiding principles, and an outline for downtown revitalization.

Phase 3: Draft Plan and Catalyst Project Identification – The draft plan was presented to city leaders and stakeholders for feedback and catalyst projects were identified to receive support from the SC Department of Commerce for early implementation.

Phase 4: Final Plan and Implementation Strategy – This plan identifies a clear vision for downtown, detailed strategies for revitalization, a summary of public input and findings, and an implementation framework for the selected catalyst project. The plan also offers guidance for longer-term policy and investment priorities that tie back to infrastructure expansion and coordinated community development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The development of the Walterboro Strategic Economic Development Plan reflects the dedication, insight, and collaboration of many partners. City leaders, local business owners, community advocates, and agency representatives all played a vital role in shaping a bold yet practical vision for Downtown's future. Their shared commitment to Walterboro's continued growth and revitalization made this plan possible.

City Council

William T. Young, Jr., Mayor
James Broderick
Judy Bridge
Ladson Fishburne
Paul Siegel
Carl Brown
Greg Pryor

Steering Committee

William T. Young, Jr., Mayor
Jeff Molinari, City Manager
Wayne Crosby, Utilities Director
Patricia Utsey, Main Street Manager & Director of Tourism
Sharon Witkin, Secretary, Colleton County School Board
Charlie Martin, Regional Operations Manager, Wayne Brothers Companies
Amelia White, Abbillow
Mary Ann Blake, Attorney, Downtown Property Owner, Colleton Chamber Board

South Carolina Department of Commerce

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There's a feeling that comes with wandering. It's unhurried, curious and open to discovery. That's the spirit this Strategic Economic Development Plan brings to Walterboro, a community with deep roots, creative energy, and untapped potential.

The theme of this strategic plan is **Wander Walterboro**

Wander Walterboro is more than a tagline. It's a vision where Downtown Walterboro thrives as a welcoming, walkable destination that invites people to wander, celebrating local culture, supporting small businesses, and welcoming residents and visitors to the front porch of the Lowcountry.

This plan builds on years of local investment and imagination. It aligns existing initiatives such as implementing the wayfinding plan, The Loop corridor improvements, and improvements to Water Tower Park with market-driven strategies and catalytic projects that invite exploration, encourage economic development, and strengthen downtown's role as both a community center and visitor destination.

At the heart of this vision are Walterboro's public institutions and civic assets: the Walterboro Wildlife Center, Colleton County Courthouse, South Carolina Artisans Center, the Colleton County Museum, Farmers Market and commercial kitchen, and the Colleton County Arts Council. These cultural anchors, paired with small businesses and distinctive public spaces like Waterfall Park and Water Tower Park, offer authentic reasons to stop, stroll, and stay. And yet, despite thousands of daily exits from I-95, most travelers never venture past the highway's edge. Wander Walterboro aims to change that.



Pedestrian Shed Map of Downtown Walterboro

Walterboro sits at a moment of opportunity. As Charleston's growth spreads westward and the Colleton Mega Site nears development, the city stands to gain residents, workers, and demand for services. Downtown can help meet those needs, providing housing, entertainment, food, and a sense of place. Market analysis points to clear retail leakage. These gaps signal opportunity for business recruitment, entrepreneurial growth, and local expansion.

A downtown hotel, especially one tied to a soft brand or boutique model, is a long-term goal to bolster activity in downtown. But for now, Walterboro must strengthen its foundation by investing in placemaking, infrastructure, and the business environment to serve residents while offering a more compelling experience to visitors. These actions will generate foot traffic and spending today, while laying the groundwork for future private investment.

The plan identifies several catalytic moves to transform the downtown experience:

- Complete the City's Wayfinding Master Plan to guide visitors and reinforce downtown's identity.
- Reimagine Washington Street with lighting, seating, and park enhancements that support daily use and special events.
- Activate the alley near the future hotel site.
- Use façade grants to upgrade rear entrances now visible along this emerging corridor.
- Add temporary surface treatments and amenities to accommodate pop-up markets, food trucks, and flexible programming.
- Coordinate marketing and activation through the City and Main Street Walterboro.
- Prime the City Development Corporation to support hotel recruitment.
- Begin construction of strategic infrastructure to include the Enhanced Refuse Facility to support events and operations.

Together, these efforts will transform underused spaces into memorable places, strengthen connections between downtown's assets, and make the area more functional and vibrant for everyone. Wander Walterboro isn't just about tourism, it is about promoting a place worth lingering in, whether you live here, work here, or just happened to take the right exit.

Five guiding principles shape the strategy:



Walterboro's story is still unfolding. With clear priorities and coordinated action, the city is ready to grow from the inside out, welcoming new opportunities while staying true to its charm. Wander Walterboro is the roadmap to that future.

PRIORITY PROJECTS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

This Strategic Economic Development Plan outlines a focused set of priority projects to strengthen Downtown Walterboro, support small businesses, and create the conditions for long-term investment. These recommendations build on years of public planning, infrastructure investment, and civic leadership, transforming momentum into a coordinated, phased strategy for revitalization. Together, these initiatives bring the Wander Walterboro vision to life.



Map depicting locations of strategic investments in Downtown Walterboro (see in Appendix A)

At the center of this strategy is a bold long-term objective: development of a soft brand hotel in the heart of Downtown. Located at the City-owned Hampton and Walter Streets site, this project has the potential to reshape downtown's economy by anchoring activity from day into evening, elevating surrounding businesses, and offering visitors an authentic Lowcountry experience. A hotel also unlocks a high-value opportunity to capture existing demand from youth sporting events, festivals, regional travelers, and interstate pass-through traffic. It provides a much-needed local lodging option for courthouse visitors, visiting families, and business travelers alike—all while reinforcing Downtown as a destination.

To position Walterboro for this opportunity, the plan calls for a set of **Prime Investment and Interim Activities** that make strategic use of the hotel site while preparing for future development. This includes construction of an Enhanced Refuse and Recycling Facility (ERF) to consolidate waste collection and improve streetscape aesthetics, while also supporting future site operations. A temporary food truck court is recommended to activate the space with local food vendors, encourage regular foot traffic, and build a food-focused customer base that complements future hotel uses. A hotel feasibility and marketing study will provide essential development data, and the reactivation or creation of a Downtown Development Corporation will ensure focused leadership for public-private partnerships.



Hotel Concept looking northeast from the corner of Walter and Hampton Streets

The plan also recommends **Placemaking to Activate Spaces** throughout the district, emphasizing the importance of gathering areas and outdoor experiences. Improvements to Waterfall Park and Washington Street will add lighting, seating, and space for events and outdoor dining, helping to draw people into downtown and support business growth. Expansion of Water Tower Park eastward toward Washington Street creates a second anchor and enhances the public realm on Downtown's eastern edge.

Improving **Connectivity and Wayfinding** is another essential investment area. Recommended projects include implementing the City's Wayfinding Master Plan with a focus on pedestrian signage, improving gateway visibility at key entrances to Downtown, and enhancing linkages between Downtown and the Ireland Creek Greenway and Wildlife Sanctuary Trailhead. Streetscape upgrades along Hampton, Wichman, and surrounding corridors will reinforce Downtown's walkability and improve access to key sites, including the future hotel.

Marketing and Promotion also play a central role in building a Downtown that is active day and night. The plan calls for pursuing Cultural District designation through the South Carolina Arts Commission to elevate Walterboro's already rich concentration of creative assets. It recommends a "Stay and Play" marketing campaign targeting I-95 travelers, Edisto visitors, and youth sports families—encouraging them to explore Downtown's shops, dining, and cultural attractions. It also recommends encouraging extended business hours and coordinated events like First Fridays and Saturday activations to reinforce Downtown as a reliable and vibrant destination.

Finally, the plan supports **Strategic Area Investment** to sustain long-term growth. These recommendations include encouraging infill residential development on sites within walking distance of food, parks, and services; promoting Downtown's east side as an emerging Cultural Arts District anchored by the Artisan Center, Farmers Market, and community kitchen; and expanding efforts to create a sustainable food truck ecosystem that supports local entrepreneurs and offers flexible dining options for residents and visitors.

More detail on each recommendation is included in Appendix B. Taken together, these strategic actions elevate Downtown Walterboro's appeal, improve quality of life, and create a compelling environment for both community and commerce. By preparing for catalytic investment while investing in place, Walterboro becomes not just a vision, but a roadmap for action.

CATALYST INVESTMENT

To jump-start downtown revitalization, this plan identifies three linked Catalyst Projects designed to deliver immediate, visible improvements while laying the groundwork for long-term growth. Funded in part by a grant from the South Carolina Department of Commerce, these projects enhance infrastructure, support small businesses, and strengthen downtown's identity. Together, they boost foot traffic, improve functionality, and demonstrate Walterboro's commitment to strategic, phased investment.



Proposed Enhanced Reuse and Recycling Facility (ERF) adjacent to hotel development

Enhanced Reuse and Recycling Facility (ERF) + Signature Downtown Signage

At the southeast corner of the city-owned lot at Hampton and Walter Streets, the plan includes a centralized, enclosed refuse and recycling facility that will eliminate the need for on-street collection by downtown businesses. Current practices promote decentralized waste collection throughout Downtown, creating operational inefficiencies and detracting from the pedestrian experience. By consolidating these functions on a dedicated and accessible site, the ERF improves both downtown aesthetics and event operations while supporting an expanded business base.

This project also features signature gateway signage to define a primary entrance into Downtown Walterboro, particularly for those arriving via Hampton Street from the Charleston region. The signage establishes a strong first impression and reinforces a sense of arrival. The ERF site plays a critical dual role—serving functional needs while accommodating future development, including the long-term goal of a boutique hotel. In the interim, the site offers opportunities for food trucks, pop-up retail, and public events, giving it both immediate utility and long-term strategic value.



View of ERF with Signage looking west along Hampton Street

Temporary Food Truck Court

As an interim activation of the Hampton and Walter site, the plan introduces a temporary food truck court to energize the area and build foot traffic. This low-cost, flexible initiative provides dining options for courthouse visitors, city offices, and surrounding businesses, helping to extend the time and money people spend downtown. It also serves as an incubator for local food entrepreneurs, many of whom already use the nearby commercial kitchen.

The food truck court will share infrastructure with the new ERF, reducing costs and ensuring easy access to necessary services. Simple site upgrades, such as lighting, picnic tables, shade elements, and modest landscaping, will transform the space into a lively, family-friendly destination. This interim use reinforces a food-focused identity for Downtown and helps test market demand ahead of future restaurant linked to the hotel. The temporary food truck court adds immediate vitality while paving the way for more permanent investment.





Temporary Food Truck Court - from the corner of Hampton and Walter Streets



Temporary Food Truck Court - from the Colleton County Courthouse (Walter Street)

Washington Street and Waterfall Park Placemaking Elements

The final component of the Catalyst Investment package focuses on Washington Street, Walterboro's primary pedestrian corridor. Community engagement consistently emphasized the need for more seating, lighting, and outdoor gathering space downtown. This project responds by introducing string lighting over the street to create a more welcoming atmosphere, particularly in the evenings, and encouraging evening activity across shops and restaurants.

Building on ongoing Waterfall Park improvements, the plan proposes a small expansion of Waterfall Park into Washington Street, increasing visibility and creating a flexible plaza space for public use. The redesigned park will include upgraded seating, restrooms, and landscape elements—creating a more prominent public space that anchors downtown's central block. These improvements not only enhance the walkability and appeal of the area but also support nearby businesses and reinforce Walterboro's "Main Street" identity.



Together, these three Catalyst Projects embody the Strategic Plan's core values: investing in what already works, creating places that invite people to linger, and setting the stage for long-term growth. By delivering high-impact improvements early in implementation, the City builds momentum, generates community pride, and demonstrates a strong return on strategic capital investment, laying the foundation for future public-private partnerships and a revitalized Downtown Walterboro.

Creating a more welcoming Washington Street and Waterfall Park

Small, thoughtful upgrades can make a big impact. Decorative string lighting, like that used in Columbia and Greer, SC, adds charm, improves safety, and extends the hours people enjoy downtown.



Similarly, the transformation of Waterfall Park can draw inspiration from successful urban spaces like Paley Park in New York City where leveraging the existing impressive water feature with simple elements like seating, shade, and water features create an inviting retreat.



These examples show how placemaking investments can turn overlooked corners into vibrant gathering spots, encouraging people to wander, linger, and support local businesses in Downtown Walterboro.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND SWOT ANALYSIS

The Walterboro Strategic Planning Charrette convened community stakeholders and a project advisory team on January 28-29, 2025, at the Walterboro Wildlife Center, located at 100 South Jefferies Boulevard. Over the course of two days, participants evaluated the city's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) and identified potential economic development strategies and projects. The charrette included meetings with the Project Advisory Committee (PAC), small business representatives, downtown stakeholders, and the public, as well as working sessions with City Council and key staff. Appendix C of this document provides a more detailed description of public engagement activities.



Strengths

- **Strategic Location & Accessibility:** Walterboro benefits from excellent regional access with multiple interstate exits and close proximity to Charleston, the Lowcountry beaches, and surrounding growth corridors.
 - **Small-Town Charm & Community Spirit:** The city is defined by its friendly people, strong local identity, and community-oriented leadership committed to progress.
 - **Natural, Recreational and Historic Assets:** Resources like the ACE Basin, Great Swamp Sanctuary, and the city's Tuskegee Airmen legacy enrich both the environment and cultural heritage.
 - **Emerging Economic & Business Environment:** A collaborative business community, increasing diversity among entrepreneurs, and a growing calendar of local events highlight the city's economic potential.
 - **Affordability & Growth Readiness:** Walterboro offers a low cost of living, available land for development, and recent national visibility that positions it for strategic growth.
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Weaknesses and Challenges

- **Workforce & Economic Limitations:** High poverty rates and limited higher-wage jobs restrict economic mobility and workforce attraction.
- **Housing Gaps:** There is a notable shortage of quality and diverse housing options, particularly for young professionals and renters.
- **Downtown Revitalization Challenges:** Vacant buildings, absentee ownership, and limited customer traffic hinder downtown revitalization efforts.
- **Marketing & Communication:** Historically, the absence of centralized, professional marketing and over-reliance on negative-leaning social media limit the city's visibility and reputation.
- **Infrastructure & First Impressions:** Uninviting interstate entry corridors have historically hindered the city's appeal to visitors and potential investors.



Opportunities

- **Downtown Revitalization & Entertainment:** Creating a vibrant entertainment and shopping district through Main Street events, historic building reuse, and diverse businesses can re-energize downtown.
- **Tourism & Heritage Development:** Walterboro can expand tourism by leveraging sports events, ecotourism, and storytelling tied to its rich history and scenic setting.
- **Housing & Infrastructure Investment:** There is significant potential to support growth through new housing development, utility expansion, and annexation initiatives.
- **Workforce Development & Education:** Partnerships with USC Salkehatchie and local training programs can strengthen the workforce and prepare residents for higher-wage opportunities.
- **Quality of Life & Public Engagement:** Expanding family activities, proactive and coordinated marketing, and adding pedestrian oriented amenities can make Walterboro more attractive to residents and newcomers alike.



Threats

- **Youth Outmigration & Job Market Gaps:** The local economy struggles to retain young talent due to limited job variety and uncompetitive wages compared to nearby metro areas.
- **Public Safety & Negative Perceptions:** Ongoing crime concerns and a reputation shaped by misinformation on social media contribute to a poor external image of the city.
- **Uncoordinated Growth & Development Pressures:** Alignment between city and county planning creates is required to guide sustainable growth.
- **Small Business Vulnerability:** Local businesses face stiff competition from larger chains, limited consumer spending, and challenges sustaining long-term operations.
- **Limited Developable Land within City Limits:** With constrained land availability, Walterboro risks losing economic development opportunities without proactive annexation and planning.



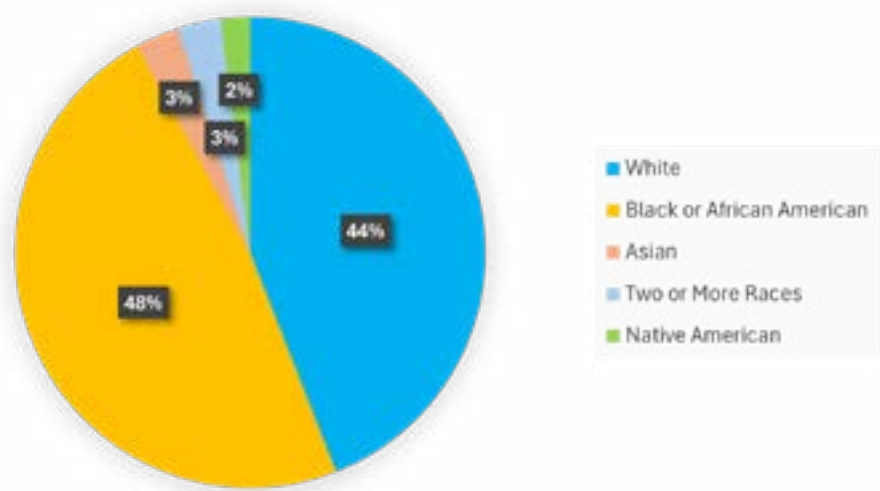
POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

As of 2023, the City of Walterboro is home to approximately 5,475 residents, making it the largest municipality in Colleton County. Over the past two decades, Walterboro and the county overall have experienced relatively flat population growth. In contrast, adjacent counties such as Dorchester, Jasper, and Beaufort have grown significantly, each increasing by more than 30% from 2000 to 2023, while nearby Hampton County has seen a 14% population decline. Walterboro’s slower growth presents both challenges and opportunities, as the community must plan for steady, sustainable development while also seeking to attract and retain residents.

Walterboro is a racially diverse community. Black or African American residents make up the largest share of the population at 48%, followed by White residents at 44%. Approximately 3% of the population identifies as Asian, 3% as two or more races, and 2% as Native American. This diversity is a cultural strength and can be a foundation for inclusive community development. However, economic disparities persist. The median household income in Walterboro is \$48,366—well below the South Carolina state median of \$66,818 and the national median of \$78,538. At the county level, Colleton’s income trends reflect similar challenges, falling behind the growing neighboring counties but remaining ahead of Hampton County.

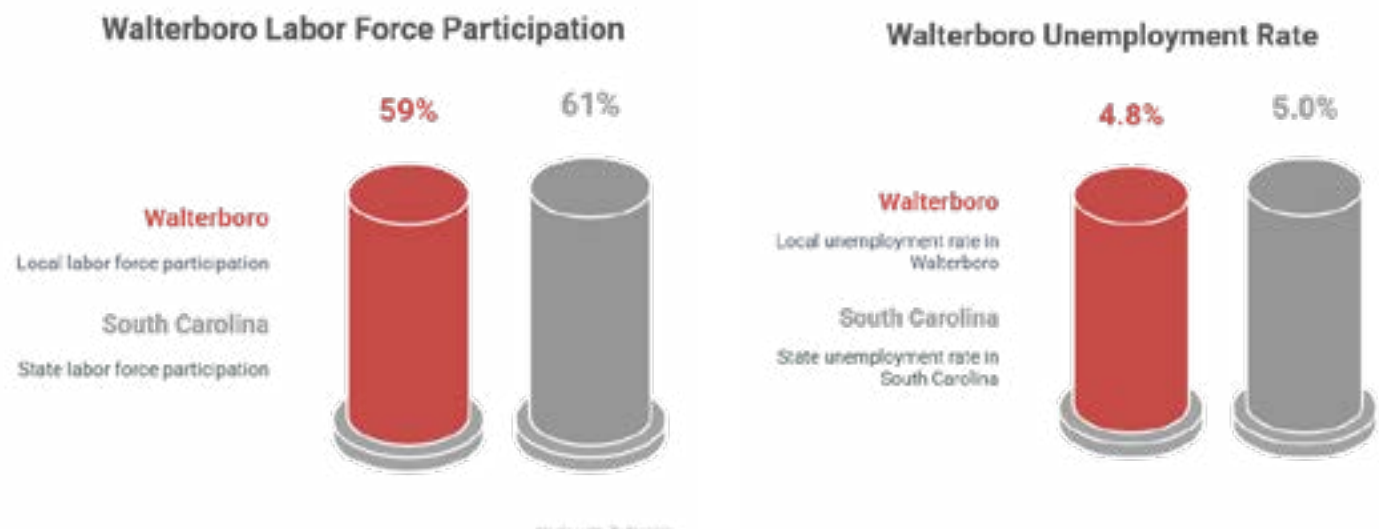


Walterboro Racial Composition



Labor force participation in Walterboro stands at 59%, just slightly below the statewide rate of 61%. The city's unemployment rate of 4.8% is on par with the state average of 5.0%, suggesting moderate alignment with broader labor trends. However, these numbers may mask deeper issues related to underemployment, skills gaps, and employment accessibility. Workforce development efforts will be key to increasing participation and helping residents move into higher-wage industries. Efforts to improve educational attainment, expand training opportunities, and attract employers aligned with local skills will be critical for long-term economic resilience.

The city's employment base spans a variety of sectors, with Education and Health Care representing the largest share at 25%, followed by Manufacturing (15%), Retail Trade (13%), and Professional and Administrative services (12%). Other sectors with notable presence include Construction (7%), Arts and Hospitality (10%), and Public Administration (5%). Industries such as Agriculture, Finance, and Information represent a very small share of the local economy. These figures suggest an economy rooted in service and institutional employment, with opportunities to diversify into emerging sectors. Targeted investment in key growth industries and supportive infrastructure could position Walterboro for inclusive and strategic economic advancement.



Walterboro's Top Employment Sectors





HOUSING PROFILE

Walterboro's housing stock reflects both its historic roots and current challenges. Of the city's 2,621 housing units, a substantial share, over 1,000 homes, were built between 1960 and 1979, indicating an aging housing supply in need of reinvestment and maintenance. New construction has lagged in recent decades, with only 84 homes built between 2010 and 2019. Housing in Walterboro is predominantly single-family detached homes with over 1,600 units, yet tenure is nearly evenly split between owners and renters. The city's median home value stands at \$170,500, higher than Colleton County's \$145,900 but significantly below the South Carolina average of \$236,700, offering relative affordability for buyers. However, cost burdens remain a concern, particularly for renters who spend a median of 31% of their income on housing, compared to 15.5% for homeowners. These trends point to a clear need for more diverse housing options, including both new rental and ownership opportunities that address affordability, quality, and the evolving needs of the community.

Total Housing Units

2,621

Housing Units

Walterboro, SC

Median Home Value

\$170,500

USD

Walterboro, SC

\$145,900

USD

Colleton County, SC

\$236,700

USD

South Carolina

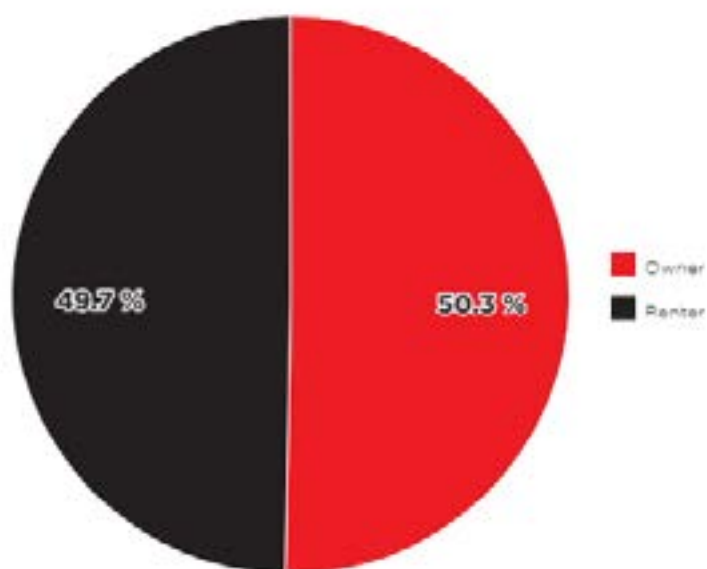
\$303,400

USD

United States of America

Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Owner or Renter Occupied Housing Units



Walterboro, SC

Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

15.5%

Median Monthly Ownership Costs as a Percentage of Income

Walterboro, SC

31%

Median Gross Rent as a Percentage of Income

Walterboro, SC

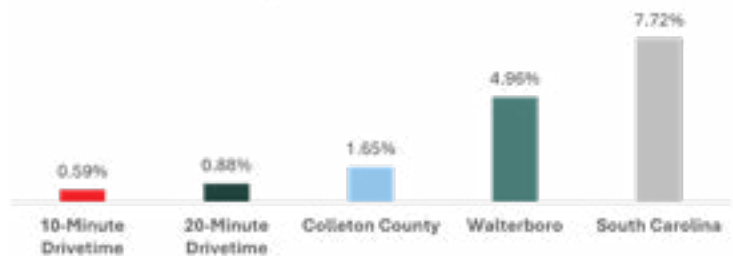
MARKET AREA ANALYSIS

Walterboro's geographic and economic reach extends far beyond its city limits. A 10- and 20-minute drivetime analysis shows that the city draws residents, visitors, and pass-through travelers along the I-95 corridor. As of 2025, the 10-minute trade area includes 12,951 residents, while the broader 20-minute area covers a population of 23,739. These numbers continue to climb, signaling a modest but important shift from decades of population stagnation.

Although Walterboro's growth trails South Carolina's statewide 7.7% increase (2020-2025), the town's trade area has steadily expanded. The 20-minute zone grew by 0.88%, and the 10-minute zone grew by 0.59% during that time. Walterboro's median age of 39.73 and its balanced age distribution reveal a community with both established households and younger generations. These dynamics suggest opportunities to support new families, services, and retail offerings.

This trade area framework defines who Walterboro serves and illustrates the city's expanding economic influence. Walterboro functions as a rural hub, attracting shoppers from surrounding areas and drawing interstate travelers who rely on its services. These patterns continue to strengthen the city's role as a center for commerce, healthcare, and daily essentials.

Percent Population Growth, 2020-2025



Population in the 10-Minute and 20-Minute Drivetime Areas, 2010 - 2030





RETAIL GAP ANALYSIS

Walterboro outperforms many rural communities by generating a significant retail surplus. Businesses in the 10-minute drivetime area report \$501 million in retail sales, more than double the \$248 million in local consumer spending. That results in a market gain of over \$252 million. In the 20-minute market area, businesses generate \$637 million in sales while consumers spend \$444 million, producing a \$193 million gain.

	10 Minute Drivetime	20 Minute Drivetime
Retail Sales	\$501,317,998	\$636,853,708
Consumer Expenditures	\$248,391,059	\$443,681,791
Retail Leakage / Market Gain	\$252,926,939 MARKET GAIN	\$193,171,917 MARKET GAIN

These figures show that Walterboro doesn't just meet local needs, it draws shoppers from well beyond its borders. Interstate traffic, regional residents, and visitors all contribute to its retail strength. This momentum confirms Walterboro's role as a commercial anchor in the Lowcountry and a key driver of Colleton County's economy.

Still, even with this strong performance, several retail categories show unmet demand. These gaps create clear opportunities to diversify and expand the local business mix.

OPPORTUNITY SECTORS

Walterboro can strengthen its downtown and commercial corridors by targeting key retail categories with persistent demand and limited supply:



Clothing and Accessories: Residents spend over \$14 million more than local stores currently capture. That includes a \$1.5 million gap in women's clothing—enough to support a well-curated boutique or lifestyle store.



Jewelry Stores: Consumers spend over \$1 million in this category outside the trade area. A local jeweler offering repair services, estate pieces, or regional collections could recapture that spending.



Furniture and Home Furnishings: The 20-minute area shows a gap of more than \$3.7 million, with strong potential for one or two stores that offer stylish and affordable home goods.

Books and Gifts: With no current local bookstore and nearly \$1 million in unmet demand for gift and novelty items, downtown Walterboro could support a hybrid concept that combines books, events, and locally made products.

Art Dealers: The market reveals over \$1 million in demand and zero local supply—an ideal niche for a gallery, artisan cooperative, or mixed-use studio and retail space that supports both economic and cultural development.

A more detailed analysis of retail opportunities is available in Appendix D of this document.

By recruiting businesses that align with these gaps, Walterboro can capture more spending, support local entrepreneurs, and reinforce its identity as a vibrant small-town hub.



WALTERBORO VISITORS

Mobility data from Placer.ai offers a deeper understanding of visitation patterns across key areas of Walterboro and reinforces the opportunity to better connect interstate traffic to the city’s historic downtown. These insights support strategies for downtown revitalization, visitor capture, and long-term investment, and reinforce the potential for a boutique hotel or lodging concept within the central core.

Downtown Walterboro welcomes approximately 175,100 visits annually, with 48,100 unique visitors and an average dwell time of 71 minutes. This stay duration suggests purpose-driven trips tied to dining, events, culture, or shopping. The average visitor returns 3.64 times per year, showing strong local loyalty. Roughly 84.4% of visitors live within 30 miles, including 62.6% within just 10 miles, reinforcing downtown’s role as a regional hub for nearby residents. This pattern reflects both community engagement and the potential to expand downtown’s draw to a wider audience.

In contrast, the west side of Exit 53, which includes six national hotel brands and a highway-oriented restaurant, sees significantly more volume with 540,400 annual visits and 321,300 unique visitors. However, visitors exhibit a shorter-term relationship. The average visitor only returns 1.78 times per year, though they stay much longer during each visit (223 minutes). Just 21.5% of these visitors live within 30 miles, and nearly 69% come from within 100 miles, indicating a traveler base passing through or staying overnight. This area serves as a critical point of contact for out-of-town visitors, and yet there is limited infrastructure to guide these guests downtown.

Even more significant is the northwest corner of Exit 57, anchored by a Walmart and several other retailers, which sees over 3.1 million annual visits and 511,600 unique visitors. While the visit frequency here is high (6.01 times per year), the average dwell time is just 43 minutes, and the audience is primarily local or regional. About 74% of visitors live within 30 miles, with 48.4% coming from within 100 miles, showing its importance as a routine shopping destination for surrounding communities.

These patterns reveal two strategic imperatives:

- Walterboro already captures substantial visitation at its I-95 exits, but much of this activity remains disconnected from the downtown core.
- Downtown offers a different type of value proposition—longer visits, stronger local loyalty, and cultural character—but currently misses out on the high volume of transient and overnight travelers staying just a few minutes away.

Characteristic	Downtown Walterboro	West Side of Exit 53	Northwest Corner of Exit 57
Annual Visits	175,100	540,400	3.1 million
Unique Visitors	48,100	321,300	511,600
Average Visit Frequency	3.64	1.78	6.01
Average Dwell Time	71 minutes	223 minutes	43 minutes
Local Visitors (Within 30 Miles)	84.4%	21.5%	74%
Regional Visitors (Within 100 Miles)	N/A	69%	48.4%
Primary Purpose	Dining, events, culture, shopping	Overnight stays, highway transit	Routine shopping



View of Hotel from Colleton County Courthouse (corner of Washington Street and Walter Street)

DOWNTOWN HOTEL OPPORTUNITY

Rather than suggesting a new hotel on the bypass, which would further segregate economic activity, the city-owned site in downtown offers a rare strategic opportunity for a lodging anchor that reinforces walkability, supports restaurants and shops, and builds momentum toward a critical mass.

South Carolina has significant precedents including, Newberry's Hampton Inn directly supports downtown's conference and cultural scene, Hartsville's Fairfield & Hampton Inn have helped fuel boutique retail and dining, while Greer and Florence offer excellent models for small-market hotels that succeed by leaning into downtown identity, not highway convenience.

CONCLUSION

Walterboro's downtown is on the cusp of a breakthrough. With solid foot traffic, longer-than-average dwell time, and under-leveraged visitor markets at the exits, it's ready to leap from small-town charm to small-town destination. Targeted reinvestment particularly in hotel development, boutique retail, and experiential anchors can tip the balance and make downtown the community's economic and cultural centerpiece.



APPENDIX B: PRIORITY PROJECTS AND IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINES

Following robust public engagement and a thorough analysis of local conditions and data, the planning team identified a series of priority projects to support Walterboro's economic development goals. The team grouped these initiatives by an expected implementation timeframe. Each one is intended to build momentum, enhance downtown vibrancy, and attract sustainable private investment.

PURSUE A DOWNTOWN HOTEL

Hotel Development (Hampton and Walter Site)

Pursue the development of a "soft brand" hotel with food and beverage amenities on the 1.5-acre City-owned site at Hampton and Walter Streets. This prime location offers a transformative opportunity for Downtown, potentially yielding a multi-million-dollar investment. City support, especially related to parking, infrastructure, and site readiness, may be needed to ensure project success and alignment with Downtown character. **Timeframe: 5+ years**

What is a Soft Brand Hotel?

A soft brand hotel is a boutique-style property that operates under a major hotel chain's umbrella while maintaining its own unique identity, design, and character. Unlike traditional chain hotels, soft brands allow for greater individuality in architecture, amenities, and guest experience, while still benefiting from the parent company's reservation system, loyalty program, operational support, and brand recognition.

Key Features of a Soft Brand Hotel

1. Independent Feel with Big-Brand Benefits - Operates with the personality of a boutique hotel but is backed by a major hotel chain (Hilton, Marriott, IHG, etc.).
2. Unique Design and Experience - Unlike standardized chain hotels, soft brand hotels often reflect local culture, history, or aesthetics.
3. Access to Loyalty Programs - Guests can still earn and redeem Hilton Honors, Marriott Bonvoy, IHG One Rewards, etc., making them attractive to business and frequent travelers.
4. Flexible Branding Requirements - Owners have more freedom in design, operations, and guest experience, unlike rigidly structured chain hotels.
5. Stronger Destination Appeal - Soft brands are typically located in historic downtowns, cultural hubs, and emerging destinations, making them a prime fit for Walterboro's revitalization efforts.

Examples



Hilton Curio & Tapestry Collections

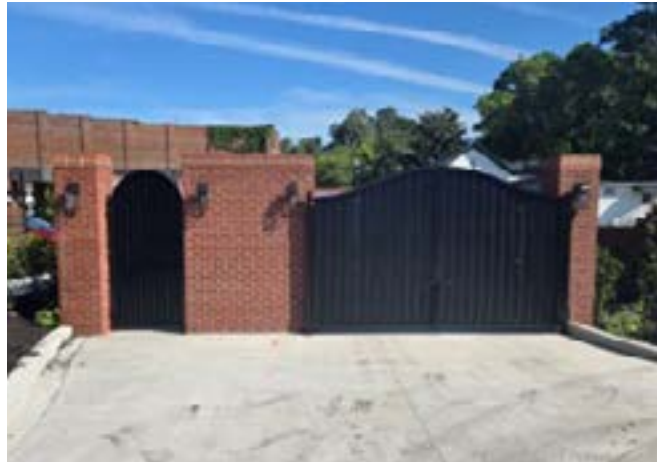


Marriott Bonvoy Tribute Portfolio

PRIME INVESTMENT WITH INTERIM ACTIVITY

Enhanced Reuse/Recycling Facility (ERF)

Construct a shared refuse and recycling facility at the southeast corner of Hampton and Walter Streets. The ERF will remove trash containers from sidewalks, roads, and alleyways, support existing and future downtown businesses, and enhance the marketability of the adjacent hotel development site. It can also serve as a location for new Downtown gateway signage. *Timeframe: 0-2 years*



Example of an ERF with decorative entry signage in Conway, SC

Temporary Food Truck Court (Hampton and Walter Site)

Activate the Hampton and Walter site with a temporary food truck court. This low-cost, interim use can provide dining options for visitors to the courthouse and City offices, energize the site, and build a food-focused customer base ahead of permanent development. The food trucks can share the new ERF infrastructure. *Timeframe: 0-2 years*

Hotel Feasibility and Marketing Study (Hampton and Walter Site)

Commission a feasibility and marketing study to assess development potential, costs, and required infrastructure for a hotel on the Hampton and Walter site. This foundational step can attract interest from developers and ensure future proposals align with Downtown character. *Timeframe 0-2 years*

Create or Reactivate a Downtown Development Corporation

Establish or re-engage a Downtown Development Corporation (DDC) to serve as a focused entity for advancing public-private partnerships and managing key redevelopment initiatives, including hotel recruitment. A DDC can help streamline development processes, manage public assets, pursue funding opportunities, and act as a liaison between the City and private investors. As Walterboro prepares for a transformative project on the Hampton and Walter site, a dedicated organization can ensure continuity, transparency, and strategic alignment. *Timeframe: 0-2 years*

Downtown Alleyway Improvements

Consolidate utilities and refuse storage in the alleyway between Hampton and Lucas Streets, located behind the south side of Washington Street businesses. Improve safety, lighting, and aesthetics to transform this underutilized space into a functional pedestrian corridor. These enhancements will support adjacent businesses, increase walkability, and create a more inviting environment for future Downtown development. The City should also explore leveraging facade improvement grants to encourage upgrades to rear-facing facades (ex: paint, windows, doors, lighting, and awnings) to further enhance the visual appeal and usability of the alley. *Timeframe: 0-5 years*

Public-Private Partnership: A Model for Downtown Hotel Development

Walterboro has laid the groundwork for transformative investment on the City-owned site at Hampton and Walter Streets. A public-private partnership (PPP) offers a clear path forward to bring a soft-brand hotel to this location—an anchor use that can extend downtown activity into the evenings, support other small businesses, and capture visitor demand from I-95 travelers, regional tourists, and sports or event attendees.

Step 1: Create or Reactivate a Downtown Development Corporation (DDC)

Establish or re-engage a Downtown Development Corporation to serve as the City's lead implementation partner. The DDC can hold and manage public assets, issue development solicitations, negotiate agreements, and ensure alignment with public goals throughout the process.

Step 2: Conduct a Feasibility and Marketing Study

Commission a professional hotel feasibility and marketing study to confirm development potential, assess infrastructure needs, and identify target operators or models. This study will inform design expectations, pricing strategies, and public investment levels. The study should also analyze how a hotel could boost surrounding businesses and support Walterboro's broader economic development goals.

Step 3: Prepare a Development Package

Develop and release a Request for Proposals (RFP) or Request for Qualifications (RFQ) targeting hotel developers. The package should include:

- A clear vision for the site and the type of hotel desired
- A summary of completed investments (ERF, interim food court)
- Available infrastructure support (e.g., lighting, streets, utilities, parking)
- Design guidance to reflect Walterboro's scale and character
- Expectations for on-site amenities (e.g., restaurant, flexible gathering space)

Step 4: Structure the Public-Private Agreement

Select a qualified developer and negotiate a comprehensive development agreement. Define responsibilities for both public and private improvements, timelines, site design, and public benefits such as pedestrian access, event programming, or community hiring goals.

Step 5: Leverage Financing Tools

Explore a mix of public and private financing options to support needed infrastructure. Potential tools include:

- Hospitality or accommodations tax revenue
- Infrastructure or rural development grants
- Installment purchase or lease-back arrangements
- Developer contributions or in-kind services
- ARPA-eligible funding for downtown revitalization

Step 6: Finalize Design and Begin Construction

Secure entitlements, finalize site and building design, and phase construction to maintain momentum on adjacent downtown activities. Communicate progress publicly to build excitement and attract interest from other potential investors.

PLACEMAKING TO ACTIVATE SPACES

Enhance Waterfall Park and Washington Street

Improve Waterfall Park with upgraded amenities, such as restrooms and improved seatings, and expand into adjacent on-street parking along Washington Street. Consider Create a more inviting gathering space and draw pedestrian activity into the heart of Downtown. Additional enhancements, such as string lighting and outdoor seating, can reinforce a welcoming atmosphere for evening events and dining. *Timeframe: 0-5 years*

Water Tower Park Expansion

Expand Water Tower Park eastward toward Washington Street to improve visibility and accessibility. Activate the space with events, public art, and programming to anchor the eastern edge of Downtown and complement the Wildlife Center amphitheater on the west end. *Timeframe: 2-5 years*

CONNECTIVITY AND WAYFINDING

Gateway Enhancements

Improve signage at key Downtown entry points as depicted in the “Wander Walterboro” plan to create more attractive, welcoming gateways that define the Downtown district and support a strong sense of arrival. *Timeframe: 0-5 years*

Complete the Wayfinding (Pedestrians)

Expand on existing pedestrian-oriented wayfinding efforts with signage that directs visitors to key destinations such as shops, restaurants, cultural sites, and public facilities—making Downtown easier to navigate on foot. *Timeframe: 0-5 years*

Connection to Wildlife Sanctuary Trailhead and Ireland Creek Greenway

Enhance trail and greenway connectivity by improving pedestrian access from Downtown to the Ireland Creek Greenway and Wildlife Sanctuary Trailhead via Washington Street. These links will help support recreation, eco-tourism, and Downtown foot traffic. *Timeframe 0-5 years*

Continue Streetscape Upgrades (e.g. Hampton Street, Wichman Street)

Implement targeted streetscape improvements—such as sidewalk enhancements, lighting, landscaping, and seating—along key corridors surrounding Downtown, including Hampton and Wichman Streets. These upgrades will support hotel development and enhance access to nearby businesses and attractions. *Timeframe 0-5 years*



MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Pursue Cultural District Designation

Walterboro should pursue official designation as a Cultural District through the South Carolina Arts Commission. This program recognizes and supports areas with a strong concentration of arts and cultural assets and supports their growth through increased visibility, funding opportunities, and technical assistance. With institutions like the South Carolina Artisans Center, Colleton County Arts Council, and an active community of local artists and makers, Walterboro is well positioned for this recognition. Designation would help solidify the city's identity as a cultural destination, attract more visitors, and support creative economy growth downtown. **Timeframe 0-2 years**

Stay and Play Marketing and Promotion

Launch a targeted marketing campaign to capture pass-through spending from visitors staying at interstate hotels, attending events at the Ace Basin Recreation Complex, or traveling to Edisto. Promote Downtown Walterboro's attractions, shops, and restaurants, encouraging longer visits and return trips. **Timeframe 0-2 years**

Extend Retail and Restaurant Hours

Encourage Downtown businesses to adopt extended evening and weekend hours to better serve visitors, residents, and event attendees. A more consistent and predictable schedule will help create a vibrant, welcoming environment and increase spending from tourists and locals alike. The City and business community should consider coordinated efforts such as "First Fridays," themed Saturday shopping promotions, or extended hours tied to events at the South Carolina Artisans Center and Colleton Civic Center. These efforts can help build momentum, foster a sense of occasion, and reinforce Downtown as an active, reliable destination for dining, shopping, and entertainment.

Timeframe 0-2 years

STRATEGIC AREA INVESTMENT

Downtown Residential Development

Encourage infill residential development within Downtown Walterboro, targeting underutilized parcels near food, services, and activities. The block south of Wichman Street between Walter and Lucas Streets is especially well-positioned for new housing aimed at professionals and retirees. The City can play a key role by supporting market studies, assembling properties, and investing in public infrastructure to catalyze development. **Timeframe: 5+ years**

Cultural Arts District Development

Strengthen the emerging arts and makers district on Downtown's east end through coordinated marketing, programming, and public investment. Build on existing assets, such as the farmers market, commercial kitchen, Artisan Center, and green spaces, by promoting the area as a destination for culture and creativity. Key opportunities include adding events at Water Tower Park, improving aesthetics, and offering rehabilitation support for small business properties. **Timeframe: 5+ years**

Develop a Sustainable Food Truck Ecosystem

Building off of the Temporary Food Truck Court, support Walterboro's growing network of food entrepreneurs by creating a supportive environment for food trucks in Downtown Walterboro for the long term. This effort can grow into a more permanent food destination with shared amenities and regular programming. The Colleton County Commercial Kitchen is already a valuable regional asset for food truck operators and caterers. A coordinated approach will expand dining options, activate underused spaces, and strengthen the local food economy.

Timeframe: 5+ years

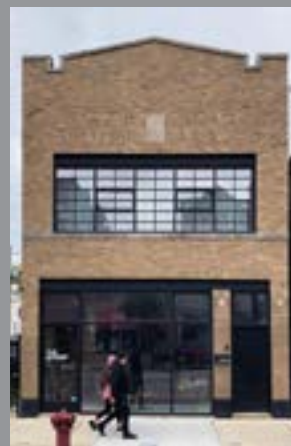
Residential Infill to Expand Housing Choice

Walterboro lacks housing diversity, limiting options for professionals, retirees, and others who want to live near shops, services, and cultural amenities. As identified in this plan, underutilized sites like the block south of Wichman Street between Walter and Lucas offer prime opportunities for new housing types that match today's demand. Thoughtful infill can introduce a mix of townhomes, garden apartments, and live-work or short-term rental units that respect neighborhood character while supporting downtown vitality. Townhomes, in particular, provide a walkable, low-maintenance option well suited to this central location.

Rehabilitation of Existing Units



Traditional Duplex



Conversion of Upper Story

New Construction



Alley Loaded Townhomes



Condominium and Attached Residential



Small Lot Single-Family



Small Lot Single-Family

APPENDIX C: SUMMARY OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The planning team conducted public engagement for the Walterboro Strategic Economic Development Plan over two intensive days during the Walterboro Downtown Master Plan Charrette, held on January 28-29, 2025, at the Walterboro Wildlife Center. The team designed the input process to gather diverse perspectives from city leaders, small business owners, downtown stakeholders, community members, and residents. Over the course of the charrette, the team facilitated more than a dozen meetings and engagement sessions, including targeted interviews, a public meeting, and a presentation of draft recommendations.

Overview of Engagement Activities

Day 1 – January 28, 2025:

- Morning session with the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and local small business representatives
- Working lunch with key City staff
- Three back-to-back stakeholder interviews focused on downtown businesses, arts and culture, tourism, placemaking, and economic development
- A Public Input Session attended by residents and local leaders
- Evening working dinner with PAC members

Day 2 – January 29, 2025:

- Team work sessions and follow-up discussions with staff
- Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations to City Council, staff, and stakeholders



Emerging Themes and Key Findings

Throughout the engagement process, participants expressed a strong sense of pride in Walterboro's history, charm, and potential for growth. They also identified clear challenges that must be addressed to ensure inclusive, sustainable development. The following themes summarize the input gathered across all sessions.

Community Identity and Strengths

Participants used words like charming, community, opportunity, and home to describe Walterboro. The city's strategic location along I-95, walkable scale, and small-town atmosphere were repeatedly noted as assets. Strong community bonds, passionate leadership, and a collaborative business environment stood out as defining qualities.

Walterboro's natural and cultural resources—including the ACE Basin, Great Swamp Sanctuary, and local history—were seen as key to tourism and place-based development. The community's response to the high-profile Murdaugh trial was cited as an example of resilience and local coordination, highlighting an opportunity to build a stronger civic narrative moving forward.

Challenges and Areas of Concern

Recurring challenges emerged in areas such as:

- **Workforce and Economy:** High poverty rates, limited job diversity, and talent retention issues.
- **Housing:** Lack of housing options for young professionals, families, and workforce populations; a shortage of multifamily, townhome, and first-time buyer housing.
- **Downtown Revitalization:** Long-standing vacancies, absentee owners, and lack of extended business hours hinder downtown vitality.
- **Infrastructure and Growth Constraints:** Limited water and sewer capacity and small available land base within city limits were viewed as barriers to development.
- **Perception and Crime:** Public safety concerns, especially around River Street, and a negative public narrative driven by social media and misinformation were seen as undermining progress.

Opportunities for Strategic Growth

Public input revealed strong support for bold, coordinated investment in:

- **Downtown Revitalization:** Creating an entertainment district, improving use of historic buildings, expanding dining and event offerings, and increasing foot traffic through year-round programming (e.g., First Thursdays, food truck rodeos).
- **Housing Development:** Expanding housing options through infill, mixed-use projects, and new neighborhoods with diverse product types to attract families and young professionals.
- **Tourism and Branding:** Leveraging Walterboro's location, film history, natural assets, and cultural events like WHAM to expand visitor appeal.
- **Public-Private Investment:** Attracting catalytic projects such as a boutique hotel, especially in the downtown core, and aligning city-county development strategies to support growth.
- **Communication and Marketing:** Investing in centralized, professional communications to counter misinformation and build civic pride.



Vision and Collaboration

Participants emphasized the importance of establishing a clear vision and mission for Walterboro's growth. Stronger alignment between the City and County, support for implementation, and improved coordination among local organizations and businesses were seen as essential to progress.

A recurring question emerged throughout the engagement: How can Walterboro grow while preserving its small-town feel? This core tension—between embracing opportunity and protecting identity—will inform the strategies and investments detailed in the plan.

APPENDIX D: MARKET REPORT

MARKET REPORT

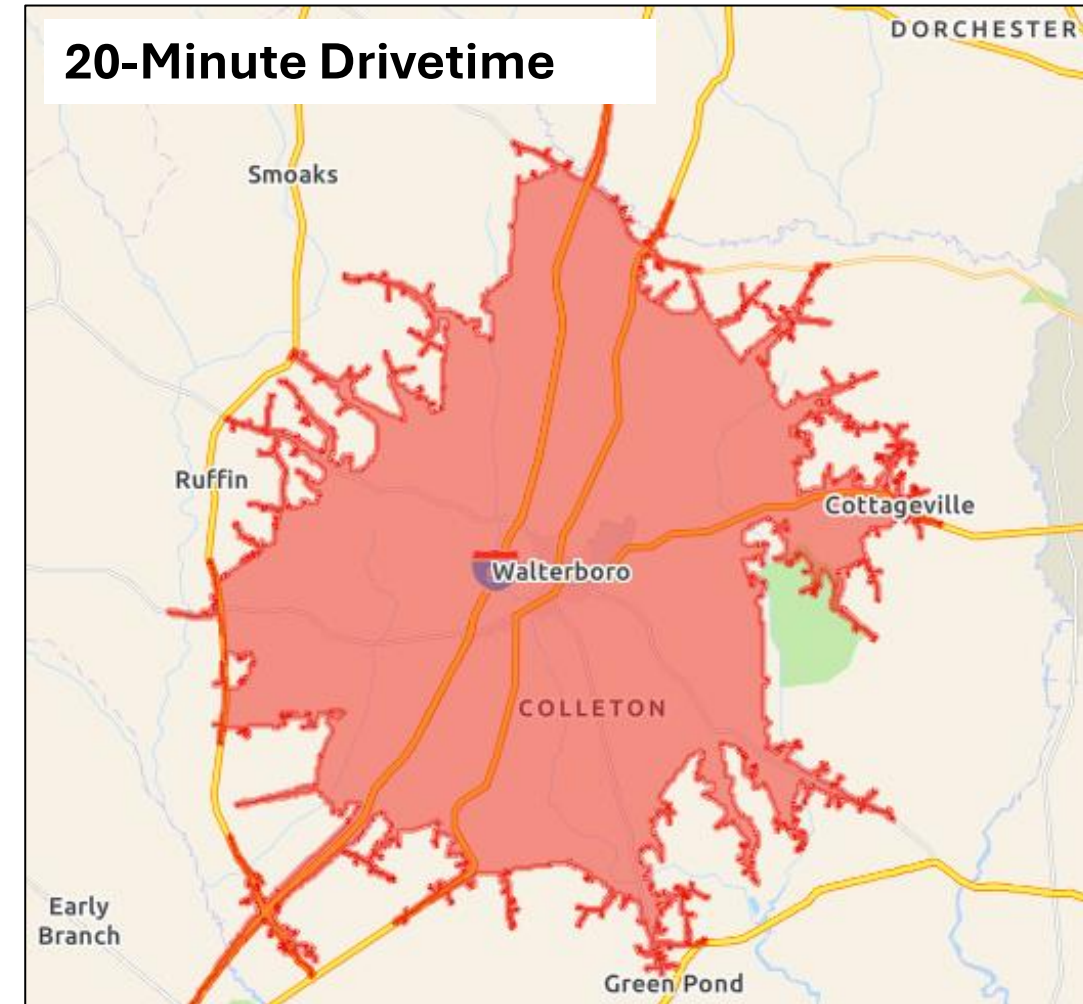


- REGIONAL CONTEXT & TRADE AREA DEFINITION
- DEMOGRAPHICS
- RETAIL LEAKAGE ANALYSIS
- RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES

REGIONAL CONTEXT & TRADE AREA DEFINITION

Walterboro's location is one of its strongest assets. Anchored just off I-95, the town is within a day's drive of major Southern cities and functions as a midway point for coastal travelers. Its role extends beyond its borders, serving a population of over 23,700 within 20 minutes and positioning it as a rural hub for shopping, healthcare, and everyday services.

Compared to a place like Bluffton, which exploded in population from just over 1,000 residents to more than 35,000 in two decades, Walterboro's growth seems quiet. But its trajectory is shifting. The tools for growth are in place: regional access, small-town charm, and a stabilizing population base. The question now is how Walterboro can leverage its position to capture more of that growth in a way that aligns with its rural character and historic downtown assets.



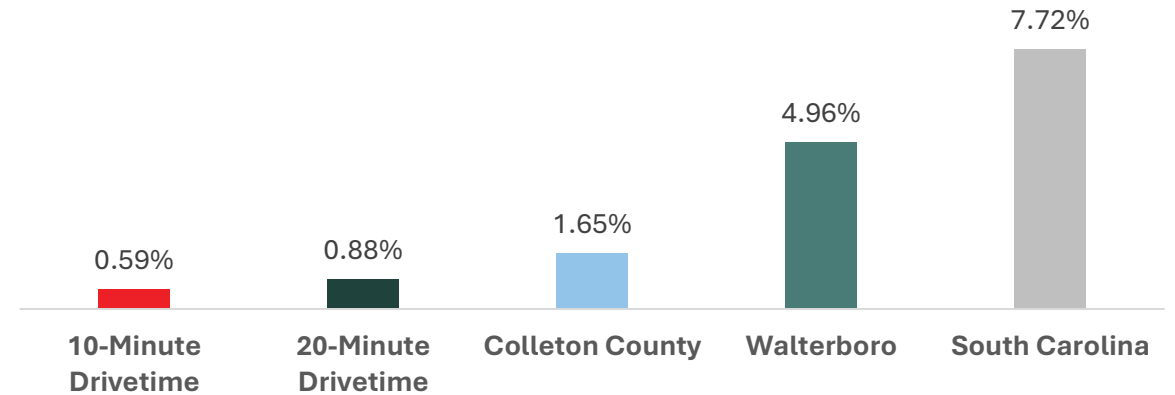
Demographic and retail data was examined for 10-minute and 20-minute drivetime trade areas.

POPULATION

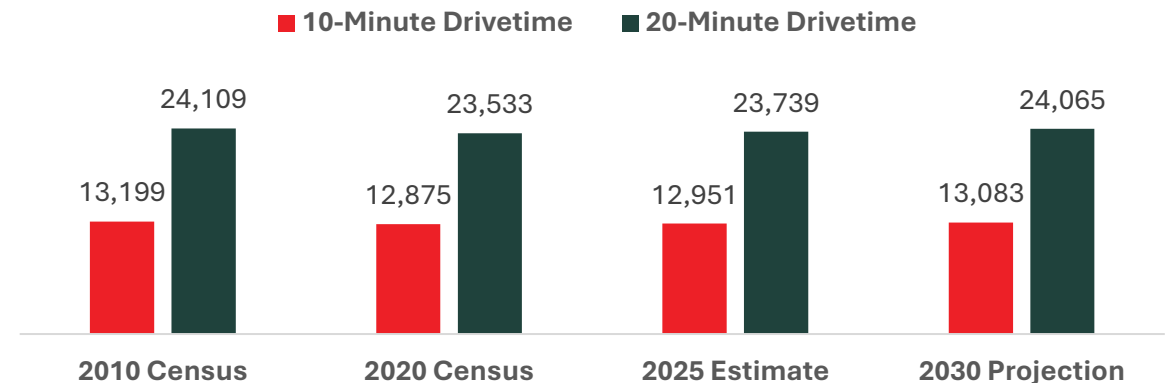
After decades of relative stagnation, Walterboro is quietly shifting direction. The town and its surrounding trade area are no longer shrinking. Now, they're slowly, steadily gaining residents. Between 2020 and 2025, the 10-minute trade area grew by just under 1%, while the 20-minute area added more than 200 new residents. While modest, these figures represent a critical pivot.

In contrast, South Carolina is growing rapidly, with nearly 400,000 new residents projected between 2020 and 2025 alone a 7.7% increase. While Walterboro's growth rate trails the state average, it reflects a broader trend: smaller communities are beginning to absorb spillover from metro growth, regional migration, and renewed local investment. This steady uptick in population lays a solid foundation for rethinking downtown Walterboro's role in housing, services, and retail.

Percent Population Growth, 2020- 2025

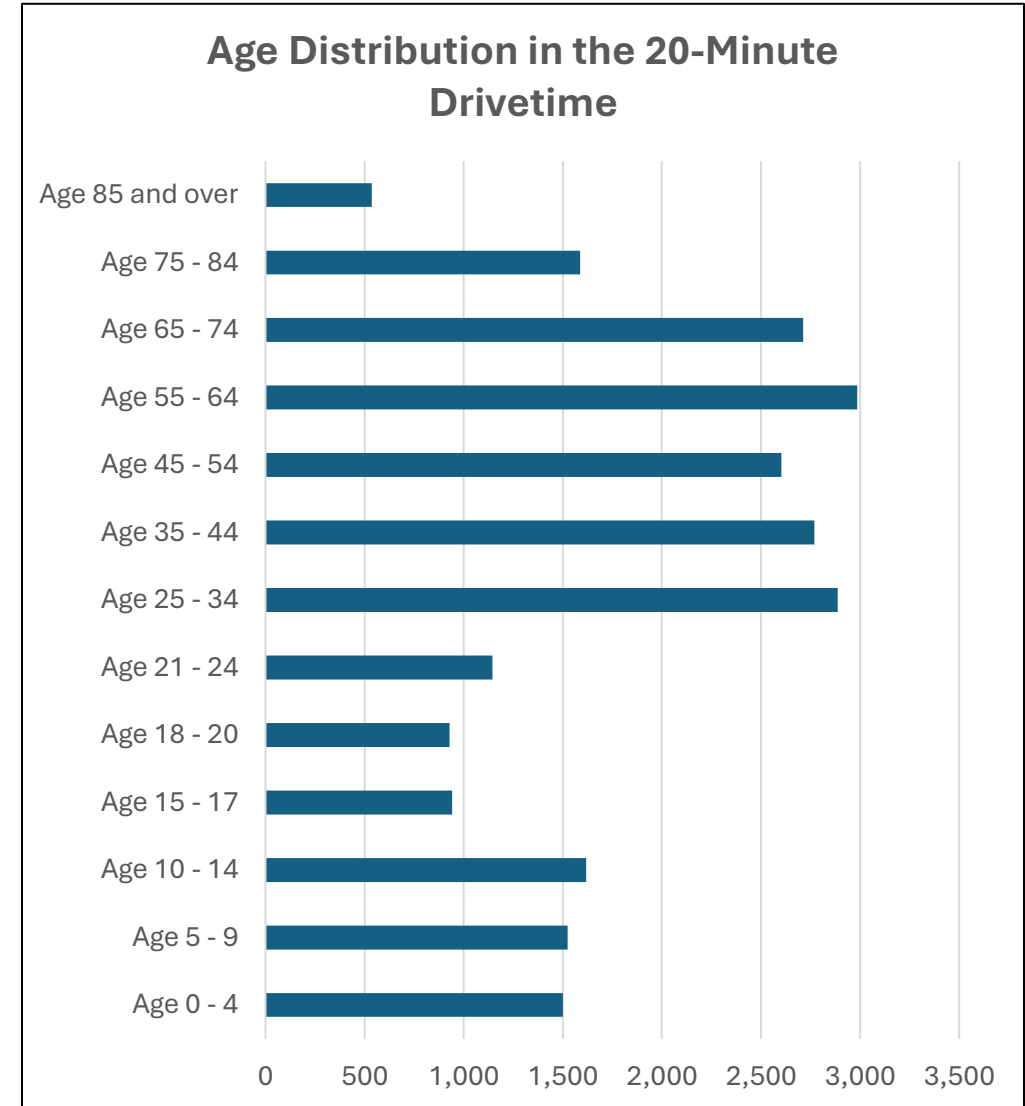


Population in the 10-Minute and 20-Minute Drivetime Areas, 2010 - 2030



AGE

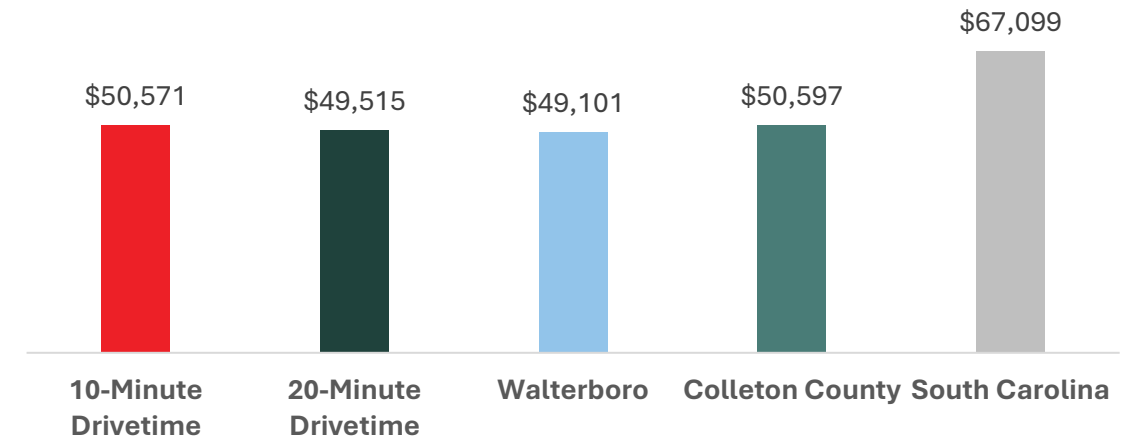
The median age in the 20-minute drivetime is 39.73, slightly lower than the median age in Colleton County (42.29) and South Carolina (40.94). Although a third of the population is aged 55+, the area has a significant portion of youth and young adults.



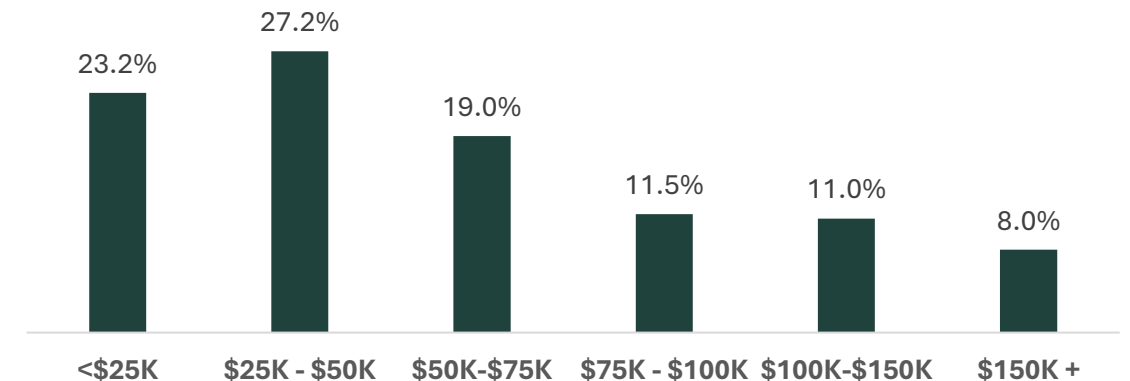
HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

- The median household income in the 20-minute drivetime trade area is \$49,515.
- **Household incomes in Walterboro and surrounding areas trail the state average** by \$17K–\$18K.
- Median incomes in the 10- and 20-minute areas are nearly **identical**, showing broad consistency in income levels regionally.
- **Disposable income is limited**, but so is competition — opening opportunities for value retail, fast casual dining, and essential services.
- Growth in moderate-income households presents an opportunity to **strengthen the local service economy**.

Median Household Income, 2025



Distribution of Household Incomes in the 20-Minute Drivetime Area



RETAIL LEAKAGE ANALYSIS

If consumers in living in an area spend more than retail sales in that same area, the market is said to be “leaking.” Conversely, if stores in the area sell more than residents are spending, the area is said to have a market gain.

Unlike many rural towns, Walterboro shows **more retail supply than demand** within both its 10-minute and 20-minute trade areas. With a surplus of over \$200 million in the 10-minute zone, it’s clear that shoppers are traveling into town from even farther out — or that pass-through traffic and visitors are meaningfully boosting sales.

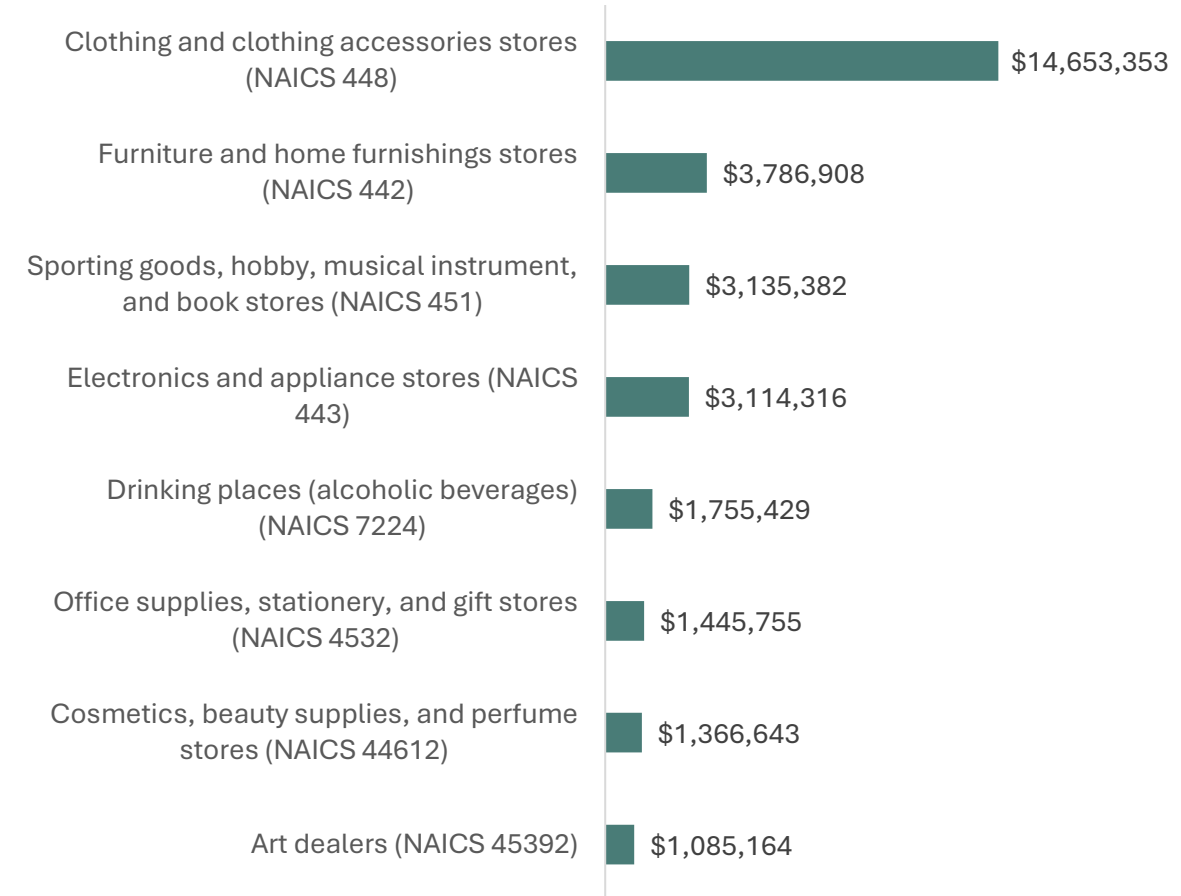
	10 Minute Drivetime	20 Minute Drivetime
Retail Sales	\$501,317,998	\$636,853,708
Consumer Expenditures	\$248,391,059	\$443,681,791
Retail Leakage / Market Gain	\$252,926,939 MARKET GAIN	\$193,171,917 MARKET GAIN

RETAIL OPPORTUNITY

Despite the overall retail gain, retail gaps in key categories still exist. These gaps present an opportunity for targeted recruitment opportunities, especially for businesses that serve local and regional needs without duplicating existing supply.

- Walterboro is **pulling in spending from outside** the 10- and 20-minute trade areas, particularly in general merchandise, food and beverage stores, dining, health and personal care stores, and building materials and supplies.
- The corridor is **overperforming**, creating a net **retail surplus** — a strong sign of downtown/regional draw.
- Despite the surplus, **select retail categories like show opportunity gaps** and warrant recruitment attention.
- Opportunities for small business growth to capture some of this existing retail leakage is detailed on the following slides.

Retail Leakage in Select Categories in the 20-Minute Drivetime Area



Women's Clothing Stores (NAICS 44812)

- **Market Gap (20 Minute):** \$1,524,496
- **25% Capture:** \$381,124
- **Estimated SF Supported:** 1,173 SF
- **Estimated Store Equivalent:** 1 boutique

Across the trade areas, women's apparel shows a consistent retail gap. The 20 minute area reveals over **\$1.5 million in unmet demand**, enough to support at least one independent boutique. This suggests that while residents may be traveling to nearby cities or shopping online, there is a ready market for accessible, fashion-forward women's clothing downtown. A curated boutique that mixes apparel with accessories, home goods, or events could tap into this demand effectively.



RETAIL OPPORTUNITY: JEWELRY STORES

Jewelry Stores (NAICS 44831)

- **Market Gap (20 Minute):** \$1,019,570
- **25% Capture:** \$254,893
- **Estimated SF Supported:** 510 SF
- **Estimated Store Equivalent:** 1 small store

Jewelry shows a strong market opportunity that grows with geography — the 10-minute trade area shows modest unmet demand, while the 20-minute trade area gap is over **\$1 million**. This category could be well suited for an independent jeweler offering repairs, estate pieces, or unique regional lines. The broader unmet demand signals that residents are likely traveling out of market for special occasion purchases, which presents a real opportunity for Walterboro to reclaim spending in this high-margin retail segment.



RETAIL OPPORTUNITY: BOOK STORES & NEWS DEALERS

Book Stores and News Dealers (NAICS 4512)

- **Market Gap (20 Minute):** \$740,344
- **25% Capture:** \$185,086
- **Estimated SF Supported:** 617 SF
- **Estimated Store Equivalent:** 1 small independent bookstore

This is a classic case of demand without supply — the 10- and 20-minute trade areas have **zero retail supply** in this category. A 25% capture suggests potential for a small, well-curated independent bookstore. This could take the form of a hybrid concept: part books, part gifts, part café or event space. Especially in a community like Walterboro with rich culture and local pride, this type of business could double as a downtown activation space.



RETAIL OPPORTUNITY: GIFT, NOVELTY AND SOUVENIR STORES

Gift, Novelty, and Souvenir Stores (NAICS 45322)

- **Market Gap (20 Minute):** \$998,980
- **25% Capture:** \$249,745
- **Estimated SF Supported:** 832 SF
- **Estimated Store Equivalent:** 1 storefront

Gift and novelty retail is underrepresented, with leakage in the 20-minute trade area approaching **\$1 million**. This category is a natural fit for downtown Walterboro, where visitor traffic, festivals, and local pride can all converge to support uniquely Walterboro-branded retail. One small shop could easily thrive here, especially if they pair locally made products, regional souvenirs, and general gift items that appeal to both residents and visitors.



RETAIL OPPORTUNITY: OTHER HOME FURNISHINGS STORES

Other Home Furnishings Stores (NAICS 442299)

- **Market Gap (20 Minute):** \$2,085,629
- **25% Capture:** \$521,407
- **Estimated SF Supported:** 1,738 SF
- **Estimated Store Equivalent:** 1-2 store

This category shows a consistently strong market gap from the 10-minute radius outward, with over **\$2 million** in the 20-minute trade area. A 25% capture supports two home-focused shops.

Opportunities range from small-scale furniture and décor stores to hybrid offerings that include gifts, candles, linens, or lighting.

Walterboro's demographic — modest but growing households — supports the need for functional, stylish, and affordable home products close to home.



RETAIL OPPORTUNITY: ART DEALERS

Art Dealers (NAICS 45392)

- **Market Gap (20 Minute):** \$1,085,164
- **25% Capture:** \$271,291
- **Estimated SF Supported:** 904 SF
- **Estimated Store Equivalent:** 1 art gallery or hybrid

Art retail is a compelling niche: zero local supply, consistent demand, and a regional opportunity exceeding **\$1 million**. Walterboro could attract an art gallery, artisan co-op, or mixed-use retail/studio concept. This would serve both the retail gap and align with broader placemaking and cultural goals. Art anchors can also support events, workshops, and creative activation in the downtown core — making this a “double win” for both economy and identity.





Walterboro Strategic Plan
South Carolina Department of Commerce