# HISTORIC MAIN STREET OXFORD 10-YEAR REPORT 2014 – 2024

HISTORIC
OXFORD

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It is with great pride and excitement that I present this 10-year report on behalf of Historic Main Street Oxford. Accredited through Main Street Alabama and Main Street America, we have spent the past decade building a stronger, more vibrant, and safe downtown that is inclusive for everyone.

Established by the Oxford City Council on July 22, 2014, HMSO has been at the forefront of community and economic development. Our work is guided by the Four Point Approach strategy of Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Vitality as outlined by Main Street America. This strategy has proven to be an incredibly effective tool for community-based, volunteer-driven, grassroots revitalization. HMSO is committed to enhancing downtown vibrancy, preserving our history, empowering our business community, and fostering a center of activity for residents and visitors.

While we celebrate many accomplishments, we acknowledge that there is still much work to be done. Our efforts are far from over, and we are excited about what the future holds for our community. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Mayor Alton Craft and the Oxford City Council members: Phil Gardner, Mike Henderson, Charlotte Hubbard, Chris Spurlin, and Steven Waits for their unwavering support. Additionally, I want to thank all of Historic Main Street Oxford's past and present board members and volunteers.

Best regards,

Hunter Gentry
Director of Historic Main Street Oxford



Photo courtesy of City of Oxford Marketing & Public Relations Department.

## ABOUT HISTORIC MAIN STREET OXFORD

Historic Main Street Oxford (HMSO) is an economic and community development organization that focuses on the Four Point Approach strategy of Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Vitality as outlined by Main Street America. The Four Point Approach makes Main Street an effective tool for a community-based, volunteer-driven, grassroots revitalization effort. HMSO was created in 2014 when Oxford became a Designated Main Street Community by Main Street Alabama.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Historic Main Street Oxford is to enhance downtown vibrancy, preserve its history, empower its community of business, and foster a center of activity for residents and visitors.

## VISION STATEMENT

Historic Downtown Oxford will become Northeast Alabama's destination for arts, dining, entertainment, shopping, and special events.

## **OUR TEAM**

Karen Grammar Charlotte Hubbard Robin Leonard, *Secretary* Gerry Lyons Debbie Nothdurft, *Vice Chair*  Gwen Parrish, *Chair*Ben Stewart
Donna Timmons, *Secretary Assistant*Hunter Gentry, *Director*Wren Munroe, *Marketing Assistant* 



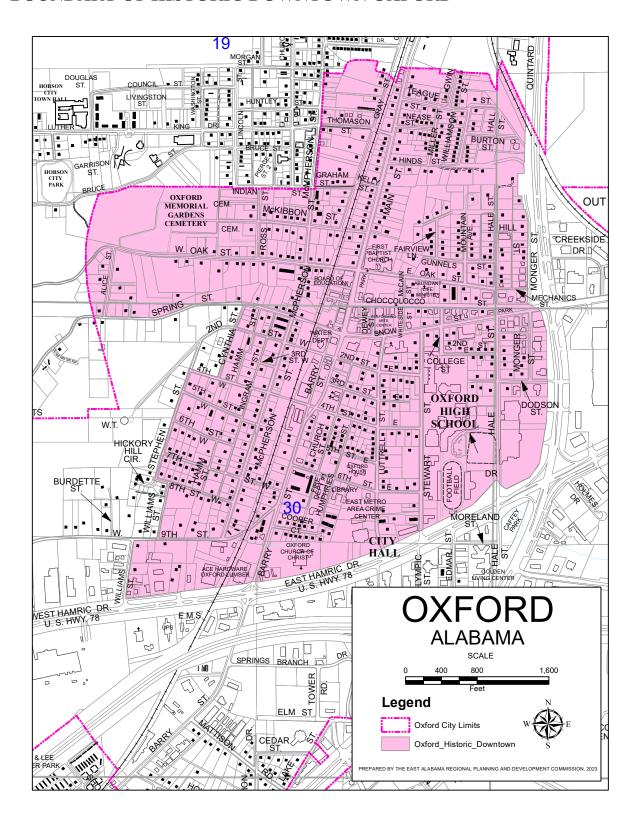
Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.

Above- View of Main Street from Snow Street looking north, ca. 1910s. Below- View of Choccolocco Street from Dewey Street looking west, ca. 1910s.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.

## BOUNDARY OF HISTORIC DOWNTOWN OXFORD



## THE EVOLUTION OF DOWNTOWN OXFORD: A JOURNEY THROUGH REVITALIZATION AND

By Hunter C. Gentry

Downtown Oxford, Alabama, has experienced a remarkable transformation from the threat of urban renewal to a celebrated example of historic preservation and community development. This essay traces the chronological journey of downtown Oxford, highlighting key milestones in its revitalization efforts and the dedication of its community to preserving its historical charm.

In the early 1970s, downtown Oxford faced significant challenges as part of an urban renewal program. The opening of Interstate 20 from Birmingham to Oxford in 1969 created new opportunities for development and expansion eastward, but it also led to drastic plans for the existing downtown area. Reports indicated that sixty-six percent of buildings in downtown Oxford were beyond repair, prompting the urban renewal program to propose the demolition of most, if not all, buildings in the area. Fortunately, this program was never implemented, allowing the historical character of downtown Oxford to be preserved.

Downtown Oxford's revitalization efforts can be traced back to the late 1970s under the leadership of city engineer Dale Garrett and Mayor Bester Adams. Garrett spearheaded a multiphase revitalization project funded by the Alabama Historical Commission. Recognizing the importance of historic buildings in providing a sense of place and showcasing architectural styles from different eras, the first phase involved surveying buildings, homes, and sites constructed before 1920. Mary Cowan was hired to assist Garrett with research and oversee the majority of the groundwork. Danny and Donna Hurt, owners of Hurt House of Photography, were tasked with photographing the exterior and interior of each surveyed property. Noted Alabama architectural historian and preservationist Robert Gamble was consulted for physical and architectural descriptions. The survey concluded that fourteen commercial buildings and 130 homes had the potential to be listed on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage due to their architectural and cultural significance. This survey is currently housed at the Oxford Public Library.

The second phase of the revitalization included promoting Oxford's history and laying the foundation for the short-lived Oxford Historical Society. During this phase, efforts were made to assist downtown property owners with facade improvements. Anniston architect George O. Parker was contracted to create renderings of what the buildings along Choccolocco Street and Main Street could look like after facade improvements and restoration. In 1981, due to a lack of funding, the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce, along with Oxford citizens and downtown businesses, began fundraising to create a pool of money for property owners to use in restoration efforts. Charles Hubbard, the owner of Oxford Furniture Company, was the first to utilize these funds for the facade restoration of 12 East Choccolocco Street.

Since the early part of the 20th century, downtown merchants have worked together to plan promotions and events. In the early 1950s, a more organized group of merchants, including Norman Moore, Howard Worthy, Carl Strength, and Howard Bentley, advocated for the business community. During the 1970s and 1980s, downtowns and small towns began to decline due to

the rise of indoor shopping malls. Notable business owners at that time included Ellis Craven, Carl Abbott, E.U. Nunnelly, and the Stinsons. In 1980, the Main Street program was established under the National Trust for Historic Preservation to aid downtowns in bringing economic prosperity back while preserving and promoting their character and history. Around this time, Billy Grizzard moved his land survey company downtown, purchasing half a block on the northern side of East Choccolocco Street, optimistic about downtown's restoration and comeback.

In October 1987, to celebrate the success of Grizzard's facade renovations and overall downtown promotion, Oxfordfest was created. Notable downtown business owners at that time included James Anderson, Johnny Bentley, Sharrell Dorsey, and Oscar Cotton. The first Oxfordfest featured about 150 vendors and music, attracting an estimated 6,000 attendees.

In the mid-2000s, downtown businesses formed a merchant association to advocate for themselves and host promotional events. The Oxford Arts Council played a crucial role in constructing the gazebo at Simmons Park, coordinating historical tours, and installing signage at the park and city cemetery. In 2008, Oxford City Councilmember June Land Reaves advocated for signage along Alabama Highway 21 and Hamric Drive to indicate the location of downtown Oxford. In 2010, Oxford received funds for a historical marker from the Alabama Tourism Department, which was promoting Alabama's Small Towns and Downtowns at the time.

In 2005, the National Trust for Historic Preservation declared May as National Preservation Month to celebrate and promote historical places and heritage tourism. This initiative built upon the efforts that began in 1973 with National Preservation Week, emphasizing that historic preservation is a vital component of economic and community development. Historic preservation contributes to city revitalization, job creation, small business incubation, housing, and tourism, thereby enhancing the overall quality of a community.

Under the leadership of Mayor Leon Smith, one of the most significant projects in downtown revitalization was the renovation of the former Oxford City Hall into the Oxford Performing Arts Center in 2011. The multi-level, Georgian Revival structure at 100 East Choccolocco Street, originally constructed in 1921 as Oxford's elementary school and later as the municipal center, has since attracted thousands of patrons from over thirty states for top-notch performances.

In June 2014, thanks to the hard work and determination of Robin Leonard, Charlotte Hubbard, and others, Oxford became one of three cities in Alabama to be designated a Main Street community by Main Street Alabama. Historic Main Street Oxford was created as an economic and community development organization focusing on the Four Point Approach Strategy of Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Vitality as outlined by Main Street America. This approach makes Main Street an effective tool for community-based, volunteer-driven, grassroots revitalization efforts.

In 2018, the Alabama Historical Commission approved Historic Main Street Oxford's commercial district nomination to the Alabama Register of Landmarks & Heritage. The boundary includes buildings in the core area along Choccolocco Street and Main Street. The registry is an honorary listing with no restrictions or financial incentives. Eight structures and

places in Oxford, including the downtown district, are currently listed in the Alabama Register of Landmarks & Heritage.

Later in 2018, Historic Main Street Oxford Board Members advocated for establishing a permanent facade grant program. Since its launch, 21 buildings in the downtown district have utilized the program, with public investment under \$30,000 and private investment exceeding \$100,000. The first property to undergo restoration with these funds was Oxford Cleaners, located at 520 Main Street.

Downtown Oxford's journey from the brink of demolition to a model of historic preservation demonstrates the power of community commitment and vision. Through decades of dedicated efforts, the town has successfully revitalized its historic core, preserving its unique architectural heritage while fostering economic growth and community pride. The story of downtown Oxford is a testament to the enduring value of historic preservation in creating vibrant, thriving communities.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street

Above- Charles Hubbard and Dale Garrett viewing the downtown revitalization rendering at the corner of Main Street and East Choccolocco Street, ca. 1980.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.

Above- View of East Choccolocco Street buildings, ca. 1980. Below- View of East Choccolocco Street buildings, ca. 2015.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.

Above- View of East Choccolocco Street buildings, 2020. Below- View of East Choccolocco Street buildings, 2023.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.

## **NEW BUSINESSES**

Since 2014, we have welcomed 31 new or relocated businesses to Historic Downtown Oxford, with 17 still thriving today. Over 60 businesses and organizations call this vibrant area home, ranging from arts and entertainment to professional services, medical offices, and municipal institutions.

Our historic community boasts some of the oldest institutions, starting with the Oxford First United Methodist Church, which has been in the same location since the 1840s. The Hartwell Masonic Lodge has been downtown since its organization in 1849. Dodson Memorial Presbyterian Church has been in its current location since 1857, and the First Baptist Church of Oxford since 1860.

Notably, Oxford Cleaners has operated downtown since 1946, run by the same family. Other long-standing businesses include Oxford Lumber, Parnell Insurance, R&R Travel, Rice & Rice, Sarah Cavender Metalworks, and The Tackle Box.

#### 2014

Above & Beyond Southern Girl Coffee Co. Tracy Bonner Salon

#### 2015

Ra-Lin & Associates

#### 2016

HOUSE Counseling Store It

#### 2017

The Main Olive Wren's Nest at OPAC

#### 2018

Alabama CASA First Class Ice Cream Main Street Mercantile Pastime Peanuts

## 2019

Horn Law Firm Matter of a Pinion Newman Law Office Tammie Shaddix- State Farm The Vine Chiropractic

#### 2020

Blackbird Emporium

#### 2021

Stepping Stones to Success Choccolocco Creek Watershed Onyx & Opal

#### 2022

Alfa Insurance-Thomas Shelton Edwin Mortgage Team Joshua Barrett Salon The Shop on the Corner Visions Salon

#### 2023

GoSocial Marketing Le Coin des Artistes Really Real Real Estate Succ It Up TEAM Rehabilitation

#### 2024

The Bank Oxford English Cottage



Photo Courtesy of City of Oxford Marketing & Public Relations.

Above- Ribbon cutting for completion of the Choccolocco Street & Main Street streetscape project, 2020.

Below-Ribbon cutting for Really Real Real Estate at 316 Snow Street, 2023.



Photo Courtesy of City of Oxford Marketing & Public Relations.

## FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT GRANT PROGRAM

In 2019, the Oxford City Council approved the Façade Improvement Grant Program, which has since funded 25 projects. Notable projects include the Hubbard Piano Company Building at 12 East Choccolocco Street (now Le Coin des Artistes), the Oxford Cleaners Building at 520 Main Street, and the English Cottage at 700 Main Street. This initiative has seen a public investment of \$13,640, complemented by a substantial private investment of \$135,261.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.

Above- Oxford Cleaners at 520 Main Street before façade restoration, ca. 2017. Below- Oxford Cleaners at 520 Main Street after façade restoration, 2019.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.

## ART INSTALLATIONS

Historic Downtown Oxford features several notable murals and art installations, two a part of the Alabama Mural Trail. This trail encourages both locals and tourists to explore Alabama's unique artistic offerings, found in both urban and rural areas. The Alabama Mural Trail is a collaborative initiative by The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development, the Alabama Association of RC&Ds, Ala-Tom RC&D, the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, the Alabama Tourism Department, and Alabama Black Belt Adventures.

*Greetings from Historic Main Street Oxford* - Designed by Stacy Booth, Director of Marketing & Public Relations for the City of Oxford, in 2020. It was installed by the Oxford Maintenance Department and Freestyle Graphix.

Oxford Yellow Jacket Mural - Designed and painted by Amber Burns and Dan Seymour of Outer Limits Media in 2021. This mural is located on the south side of Oxford Cleaners at 520 Main Street.

*Mediterranean Mural* - Painted in the 2010s by Gabriella Gibson, an employee of Sarah Cavender Metalworks. It is located at 500 Main Street on the north side of Sarah Cavender Metalworks facing West Choccolocco Street.

Ghost sign "Hubbard Piano Co" - Located at 16 East Choccolocco Street on the east side of Hubbard's Off Main, painted around the 1980s.

Coca-Cola ghost sign - A replica of the original sign, located at Fresh Value at 601 Main Street.

## AWARDS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Historic Main Street Oxford has received multiple awards and acknowledgements for its contributions to the community. Main Street Alabama annually coordinates its Awards of Excellence, recognizing projects and individuals for their significant impacts in their communities. Historic Main Street Oxford has been particularly distinguished, receiving the Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce's Larry K. Sylvester Small Business Advocate award in 2020. Additionally, numerous downtown businesses have been top winners in The Anniston Star Reader's Choice Awards since 2014, highlighting the area's ongoing excellence and community impact.

#### 2013

Main Street Hero Award- Main Street Steering Committee Main Street Alabama

#### 2014

Main Street Hero Award- Oxfordfest Board Main Street Alabama

#### 2015

Main Street Hero Award- Leah Cleghorn Sparks Main Street Alabama

#### 2016

Main Street Hero Award- Enzor & Maniscalco Main Street Alabama

#### 2017

Main Street Hero Award- Robin Leonard Main Street Alabama

#### 2018

Main Street Hero Award- Charlotte Hubbard Main Street Alabama

Excellence in Historic Preservation- Oxford Cleaners Main Street Alabama

Excellence in Business Promotion- Southern Girl Coffee Co.

Main Street Alabama

## 2019

Main Street Hero Award- Gwen Parrish Main Street Alabama

Excellence in Planning & Public Space- City of Oxford Main Street Alabama

#### 2020

Larry K. Sylvester Small Business Advocate-Historic Main Street Oxford Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce

#### 2021

Main Street Hero Award- Debbie Nothdurft Main Street Alabama

Excellence in Building Design (Non-Historic)- The Vine Chiropractic Main Street Alabama

#### 2022

Main Street Hero Award- Earl & Kay Glass Main Street Alabama

Excellence in Public / Private Partnerships- Main Street Rivalry 5K Main Street Alabama

Excellence in Preservation- DAR & Daughters of 1812 Marker Dedication Main Street Alabama

## 2023

Main Street Hero Award- Oxford Cleaners Main Street Alabama

Excellence in Creative Promotion Idea- Sips & Succs (Succ It Up) Main Street Alabama

Excellence in Reinvestment: \$10 Million Dollars- Oxford Main Street Alabama



Photo Courtesy of Main Street Alabama.

## **ANNUAL EVENTS**

Historic Main Street Oxford hosts a variety of vibrant events throughout the year, contributing to the community's rich culture and providing numerous opportunities for fun and engagement.

#### Christmas on Main (5th Annual)

An annual downtown holiday open house featuring sales, promotions, horse and carriage rides, live entertainment, movies at Simmons Park, and a Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony.

## Downtown Litter Clean Up Days

Initiated in 2024, this annual event replaces the former Keep Oxford Beautiful initiative, focusing on cleaning up litter in downtown Oxford.

## Historic Walking Tours on Main

In partnership with the Alabama Department of Tourism's April Walking Tours initiative, Historic Main Street Oxford is proud to organize an array of captivating walking tours every Saturday throughout April! Historic Walking Tours on Main are open to the public & completely free of charge.

#### Main Street Rivalry 5K (4th Annual)

A competitive 5K run co-hosted with Main Street Anniston, celebrating the rivalry between the two sister cities. The event features a competition for the most sign-ups and winners in each category division. It has been recognized with a Main Street Alabama Award of Excellence.

#### Market on Main (5th Annual)

Held monthly at Simmons Park on Saturday mornings during Spring and Summer, this event is a seasonal artisan and craft vendor market. It evolved from the former "Downtown after Sundown" and "Main Street Market" events.

#### Second Friday on Main (3rd Annual)

Occurring monthly from April to September, this event includes mobile food vendors, live entertainment, lawn games, bounce houses, art vendors, the Choccolocco Cruise-In, and a movie.

#### Trick-or-Treat on Main (10th Annual)

A family-friendly Halloween event featuring bounce houses, slides, carnival games, food trucks, live entertainment, costume contests, and free candy. Attendance has ranged between 20,000 to 25,000 participants in previous years.

#### Witches Ride & Walk on Main (5th Annual)

A spirited stroll through downtown Oxford where participants dress as witches, warlocks, or goblins and distribute candy to spectators. The event is inclusive of men and children.

## Oxfordfest (38th Annual)

Organized by the Oxfordfest Committee, a non-profit entity, this annual arts and crafts festival has been a staple since 1986, drawing over 20,000 attendees. The festival features vendors, food, live music, and activities for all ages.



Photo Courtesy of Historic Main Street Oxford.



Photo Courtesy of Eli Pruett.

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT & ADVOCACY**

## **Groundbreakings & Ribbon Cuttings**

The City of Oxford offers complimentary assistance with groundbreaking and ribbon-cutting ceremonies. Since 2018, Historic Main Street Oxford has coordinated over 10 ribbon-cutting ceremonies in downtown Oxford.

## **Monthly Merchant Meeting**

Historic Main Street Oxford organizes a monthly meeting for downtown businesses and organizations to network and stay informed about downtown activities. After a brief business session, the group tours a business, which is later featured as Historic Main Street Oxford's "Business/Organization of the Month."

## **Business Development Workshops**

To better equip the downtown business community, Historic Main Street Oxford coordinates quarterly workshops at no cost to downtown, Oxford, and regional businesses. These workshops provide opportunities for partnerships with local, regional, and national organizations and serve as collaborative networking opportunities. Topics have included City of Oxford Zoning 101, Downtown Resources & Incentives, Fire Safety & Prevention, How to Use Canva for Your Business, Leadership in Every Generation, and Small Business Marketing Plans.

#### **Window & Storefront Contest**

Historic Main Street Oxford coordinates a quarterly storefront and sales window decorating contest in partnership with GoSocial Marketing and Oxford Lumber. Each winner receives a sign noting the contest and winner, as well as a gift pack.

## **Social Media Campaigns**

"Why I Love Main Street" Testimonials

Started in 2023, this campaign features downtown business owners, managers, and staff sharing why they love downtown Oxford.

National Preservation Month

In 2005, the National Trust for Historic Preservation declared May as National Preservation Month to celebrate and promote historical places and heritage tourism. Since 2019, Historic Main Street Oxford has run a social media campaign called "This Place Matters."

## Main Street Alabama Day on the Hill

Governor Kay Ivey proclaimed April 12, 2023, as Main Street Alabama Day, celebrating downtown revitalization efforts across the state. Main Street Alabama coordinators, staff, board members, and local program directors, including Hunter Gentry, Director of Historic Main Street Oxford, attended the event in Montgomery. They met with legislative members, including Representative Chad Robertson, Representative Barbara Boyd, and Senator Keith Kelley. On March 6, 2024, Main Street Alabama staff and local program directors gathered in Montgomery for another Day on the Hill, focusing on the importance of downtown revitalization and supporting small businesses. Hunter Gentry also had a productive meeting with Senator Keith Kelley.

## **Main Street America Conference**

In early May, Main Street Alabama hosted the Main Street America 2024 Now Conference. This event brought together Main Street Directors, board members, downtown development professionals, and community leaders from across the United States and Japan. Attendees from Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas, and Washington engaged in insightful discussions and experiences in East Alabama. The tour began in Heflin, exploring Carillon Oaks Heflin, the Pinhoti Trailhead, and Cahulga Creek Park. In Oxford, participants enjoyed lunch at Hubbard's Off Main and visited the Oxford Performing Arts Center, Southern Girl Coffee Roasting Co., and the anticipated Spring Street Station at the historic Oxford Railway Depot. The event concluded in Anniston, with visits to Anniston City Market, Freedom Riders National Monument, the new Federal Courthouse, Noble Street Park, Coldwater Mountain Brewpub, and the Sinclair Social.



Photo Courtesy of Main Street Alabama.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## Alabama Register of Landmarks & Heritage

The Alabama Historical Commission established the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage to recognize and promote the preservation of the state's historic places. The Alabama Register documents buildings, sites, structures, objects, districts, and cultural landscapes across Alabama that possess historic integrity and significance. These properties can be of national, state, or local importance. While the designation is honorary and does not impose restrictions or provide financial incentives, it serves as a crucial tool for acknowledging and preserving Alabama's rich historical heritage.

In March 2018, the nomination for the downtown Oxford district was approved, encompassing 20 contributing properties and 7 non-contributing properties. This district includes Main Street from Oak Street to Snow Street and Choccolocco Street from Main Street to Dewey Street, featuring buildings constructed between the 1870s and 1920s.

## **Historic Plaque Project**

In the fall of 2023, Historic Main Street Oxford initiated its Downtown Historic Plaque Project. The program aims to promote the recognition and preservation of downtown landmarks by highlighting their architectural styles, construction eras, significance, and current conditions. By integrating Oxford's rich history into the fabric of our contemporary community, this project underscores the importance of historical awareness. In its inaugural year, the project marked 10 buildings with historic plaques, celebrating their unique contributions to Oxford's heritage.

## **Legends & Lore**

In 2021, Historic Main Street Oxford successfully applied for and received funding from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation for a Legends & Lore marker. This marker, positioned near the welcome sign at the intersection of Choccolocco Street, Snow Street, and Alabama Highway 21, recounts the tale of Oxford's Legend of Lickskillet, a story that predates the town's establishment.

## **IMPROVEMENTS & CAPITAL PROJECTS**

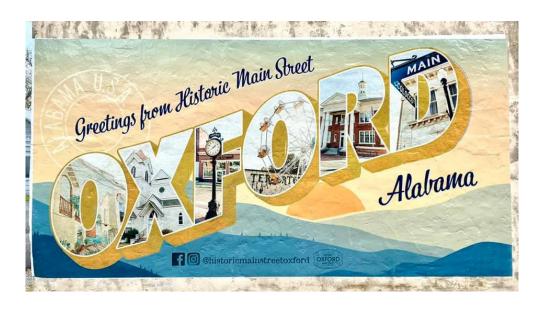
## Welcome Sign

In 2021, Historic Main Street Oxford received a grant from the Alabama Power Foundation through the Good Roots Program. This grant-funded project aimed to enhance the landscaping at the entrance of Historic Downtown Oxford. With the invaluable support of the Oxford Street Department and Alabama Power, the project was successfully completed by Hale Building & Construction. We are deeply grateful for their contributions to beautifying our historic downtown.

## **Streetscape Project**

In the spring of 2020, the City of Oxford completed a transformative three-year streetscape renovation in Historic Downtown Oxford. This \$3 million project created an inviting, pedestrian-friendly destination and demonstrated a significant investment in the area's revitalization, preservation, and development.

The project, which began in the fall of 2017, was primarily funded by the city with additional support from grants. Engineering and design were handled by Goodwyn, Mills & Cawood, while Hale Building & Construction executed the work. The renovation included new sidewalks with brick pavers, underground utilities, green spaces, and street lighting, enhancing the overall aesthetic and functionality of the downtown area. The project's excellence was recognized with an Award of Excellence in Planning & Public Space from Main Street Alabama.



## **CONTACT US**

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