

Grant could save piece of past

Railroad depot might be destination again

By **Tony Lombardo** | *Staff Writer*

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Given a solid nudge, the wide doors of the Reynolds Street train depot still creak open, letting sunshine stream in.

But instead of showing the bustling commerce that once was, the daylight reveals strewn beer cans, broken glass and years of neglect.

"It's beautiful," said Main Street Augusta Chairman Hal Hood, looking beyond the depot's present state. "This depot needs to be saved."

Working together, the Downtown Development Authority, Main Street Augusta and the Augusta Commission applied this month for a \$1 million transportation enhancement grant from Georgia Department of Transportation funds to rehabilitate the aged and unused property.

The depot was built in the 1850s by South Carolina Railroad, along with the railroad bridge crossing the Savannah River. It linked Georgia and South Carolina and helped open inland commerce in the Southeast.

"You can almost feel the people here - the activity," Downtown Development Authority Chairman Phil Wahl said, reflecting on a time when goods were loaded and unloaded at the depot.

Part of the original depot still stands at Fifth and Reynolds streets in the form of an office building, as does a freight warehouse built in the early 1900s that runs parallel to Reynolds. The original freight depot along Fifth Street was destroyed sometime after 1970.

The city owns the 17,500-square-foot depot and the adjacent land along the river and hopes to use it for public gathering space, offices and possibly a railroad museum, Mr. Wahl said. A renovated depot could also lead to future projects on the vacant land next door, such as a new hotel, he said.

The CSRA Regional Development Center helped with the application process after notifying the development authority and Main Street of the grant about two months ago.

After turning in the application Friday, all parties are waiting for a decision from the transportation board, which will come in December.

"The grant is probably the only way the project will work," Mr. Hood said.

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What's Next:

Augusta officials expect to begin renovation immediately on the depot property if the city's application for transportation grant funds is approved. Georgia's Transportation Board is set to make its decision in December.

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