

CITY OF DENTON

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN



Fregonese
Calthorpe
ASSOCIATES
Urban & Regional Planning



T · I · P S T R A T E G I E S

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The city of Denton was established in 1857 at the location where today's courthouse stands and was incorporated in 1866. As the city grew and prospered, downtown became the city's commercial center. While Denton has grown from a city of only 26,844 people in 1960 to an estimated population of 86,550 in 2002, the Denton downtown has not shared in that growth and prosperity.

Nevertheless, downtown Denton represents the very heart and soul of the community – the courthouse in its square is one of the finest of its type in Texas, and the square itself is an integral part of the city's culture. Festivals, celebrations, and other activities are held in the square and among its historic buildings.

Denton certainly has the potential to undergo a successful revitalization of its downtown – something many other communities have accomplished during the last decade. In many of these communities, the downtowns have become centers



of vital growth, providing jobs and raising property values. They also have brought a strong core of small businesses, business and civic centers, entertainment districts, unique housing opportunities, and cultural and artistic quarters. With one of the best physical cores in north central Texas, Denton is well positioned to design a downtown that functions as a vital business and civic center, bustling with activity and investment.

Historic downtown Denton.



Why This Plan Is Needed

This plan is intended to convert the vision of a vital downtown into reality. Simply planning for a better downtown will not lead to its success – it will require a concerted effort by city leaders, local businesses and residents, and new investors. Fortunately, the city has many of the tools in place that can help create a renewed downtown – appropriate regulations, key strategic public investments, and partnerships with the public sector.

This plan is the result of studies and workshops that envision a downtown that functions as a center of community business and culture. A key component is the set of strategies that will lead to change – a process that builds on success and encourages private investments that are crucial to the downtown’s vitality.



This overlay of the Golden Triangle Mall on top of Denton's downtown shows that in both places the distance pedestrians walk are similar.



How The Vision For Downtown Was Created

As part of developing this plan, two workshops were held with stakeholders from the downtown area. They were asked how they would like the downtown to change during the next 20 years.

The groups were divided into tables of about eight people, and each group was given a large-scale map of the downtown. They were asked to place “chips” (small pieces of paper that contained various kinds of buildings or uses) on the map and draw the kinds of improvements they would like to see. In addition, the groups were asked to design a street cross section for the two common street widths that dominate the downtown – 60 feet and 80 feet of right-of-way.

The workshop results helped focus and organize the approach used for the plan. Participants helped identify a set of key values and visions that will help guide the downtown into a more vital, active, and pedestrian friendly area that becomes a shining light for the community.

The following section includes a brief description of the vision outlined during these workshops and in discussions with community leaders.



Participants work together at the community workshop.

A Vision For Downtown Denton

Downtown Denton is an area with great potential in all dimensions: economic, cultural, historic and social. This potential holds great promise in the quest to create a thriving, successful downtown. Downtown Denton can choose to add one or more specific elements, e.g., a business center, an entertainment center, a conference center, a transit hub, or residential development. Whatever the specific project, it should be evaluated in terms of how that project contributes to Denton's long-range vision for its downtown.



A main goal of Denton's long-range vision is to have a linked park and open space network.

The following are goals that define the vision for downtown Denton:

- ◆ Downtown should be a vital part of Denton's economy. Each year, there should be more jobs, more retail sales, and higher property values in downtown.
- ◆ Downtown should be a source of civic pride. Downtown should complement the historic courthouse as something that citizens of Denton can feel proud of.
- ◆ Downtown should be a place to live, work, and play. Downtown should have residents, offices, shops, and entertainment. Everyone in Denton should be able to see something in downtown that is appealing and interesting.
- ◆ Downtown should contain compact and concentrated activities. Developments and infrastructure should reinforce the sense of downtown as having connected activities within a single neighborhood.

◆ Downtown should contain a variety of things to do. Everyone in Denton should find several things every year, if not every month, that bring them to downtown.

◆ Downtown should be pedestrian friendly and an enjoyable place to walk. All of downtown needs to have good pedestrian infrastructure, including sidewalks, shade and calm traffic.

◆ Downtown should have linked parks and open spaces. Green areas feel larger and more of an amenity if they are linked. Parks are venues for a variety of activities as well as open space amenities.

◆ Downtown should be attractive and well designed. New developments should increase the overall quality of downtown. In particular, buildings should be durable, compatible with historic structures, and reflect the local community.

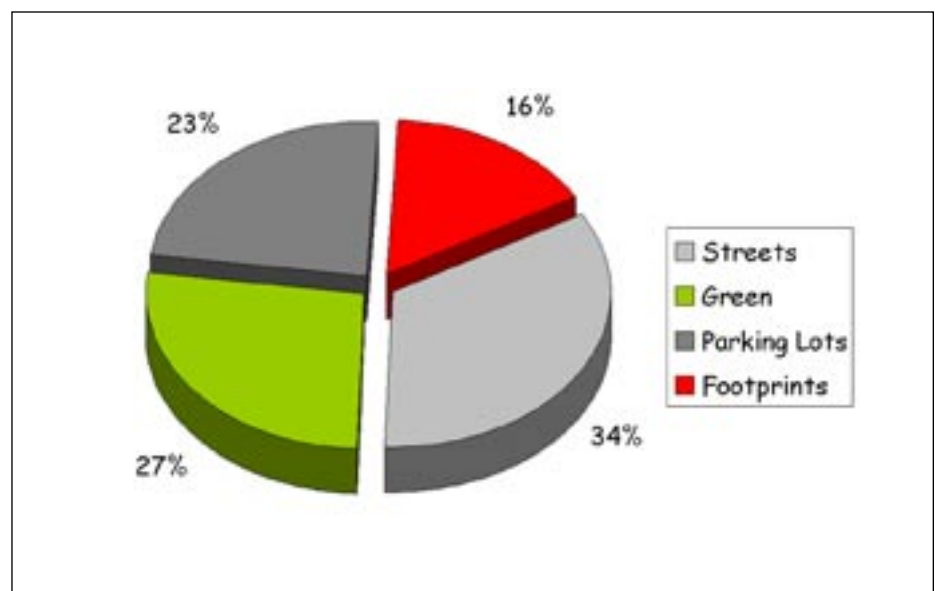
*Developments that meet these goals are investments in downtown Denton that create value for future generations.

Downtown Denton Today

Denton's historic downtown is a well-established and prosperous central business district. Denton's downtown occupies approximately 440 acres. Downtown is home to more than 1,000 buildings that provide employment, eclectic shops, unique restaurants, museums, galleries, and live entertainment venues for citizens and visitors alike.

This 60-block area has as its focal point the historic Denton County Courthouse Square. Recently a number of businesses have renovated and reused historic commercial buildings on the square and have shown great respect for the square's character. In other instances, however, renovations and infill development have been incompatible with the city's aesthetic and functional objectives – an alarming trend that has surfaced as investment interest rose in the area. Two corridors (pairs of one-way streets) extending from the square, the Oak-Hickory corridor and the Elm-Locust corridor are prime candidates for redevelopment.

Denton is the county seat of Denton County, which is part of the eight-county Dallas primary metropolitan statistical area (PMSA). According to the 2000 Census, Denton County's population totaled 432,976, with 80,537 living in the city itself. During the past 30 years, Denton has grown at a slightly faster annual compound growth rate than the state did over the same period. Denton County stands to grow significantly during the next decades.



Physically, the downtown area is about 34% streets and street rights of way, and about 66% lots. Considering the downtown as a whole, 34% is streets, 23% is parking lots, 16% is covered by buildings, and 27% is in vegetation or landscaping.

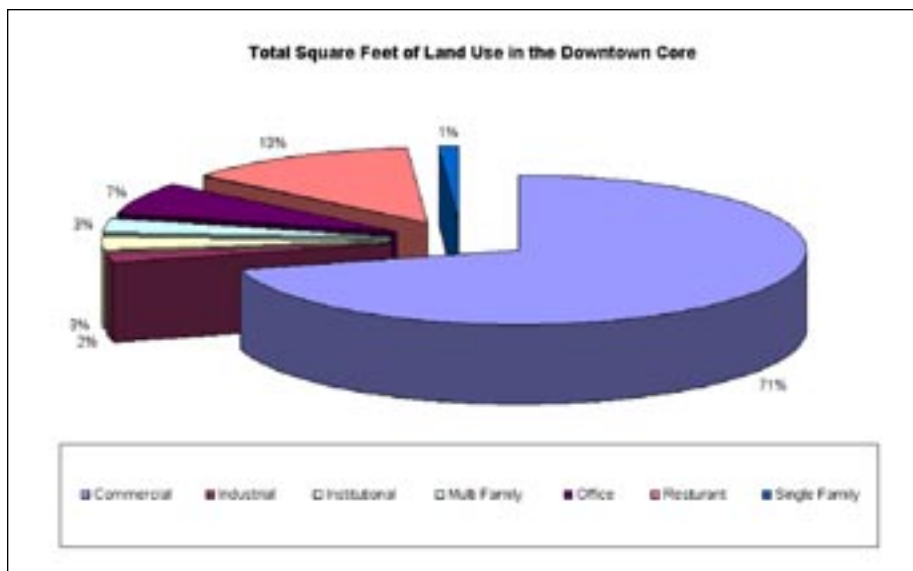
Current Conditions

One of this plan's fundamental goals is to achieve a balanced and diverse mix of compatible uses. A mix of housing, jobs, services and attractions is necessary to shape a vibrant and pedestrian-friendly downtown. More than two-thirds of the downtown is occupied by commercial, retail and restaurant uses. With less than 18 percent of the downtown used for housing, the area has fallen out of balance, requiring people to travel into and out of the downtown areas, primarily by car. Developing a variety of housing options within the downtown and adjacent areas means more people will be able to use and appreciate the area.

DOWNTOWN PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION

Many business owners, as well as visitors to downtown, feel that parking spaces are too few and far between. Parking can feel limited, especially during the afternoons and evenings around the historic square. The crunch is felt hardest during special events and festivals, such as Dog Days of Summer. Parking plays an important role in any downtown. This master plan asks the following questions: (1) is there a need for additional parking supply, (2) is there a solution to alleviate the parking problem, and (3) is there really a problem or just a perception of a problem?

One of the first issues to address in the downtown is that of transportation and parking. Downtown has excellent access from the community but generally is circumvented unless it's the specific destination. As a result, it doesn't have the advantage of drive-by traffic, as do areas along on major arterials and freeways. On the other hand, the slower, calmer pace of traffic in the downtown make the streets a potentially much more inviting place to live, work or shop.



A profile of downtown uses today.

The downtown's transportation problems are not related to through traffic or excessive congestion. But even when the plan is fully implemented, the streets will have enough capacity to accommodate the expected traffic.

The main transportation problems relate to parking availability and alternative modes important to downtowns – walking and transit.

Downtown in Context

One of Downtown Denton's strengths is its strategic location. It lies directly between TWU and UNT, the Denton Courthouse is within 1 mile, and many civic and federal uses are located within the downtown's core. The downtown is easily accessible by Interstate or Surface Street and is equipped with many cultural amenities including a theater, an abundance of shopping as well as civic parks.



Context Map of downtown Denton (study area shown in beige).

Walking & Downtowns

While downtown Denton has ample parking, the perception among Denton residents is that parking is limited – mainly because they have unrealistic expectations about trying to park only at their specific destination. There is a perceived unwillingness to walk even a block from the car to a particular destination. But the reality is that most downtowns, including Denton's, would operate most successfully with shared parking.

The advantage of traditional downtowns like Denton's is that there are many small shops close together on a street. While on street parking should be maximized, it is impractical to provide sufficient parking for each store within a few feet of its front door.

In fact, the distances needed to walk in downtown Denton are similar to those encountered in a suburban shopping center – the scale of these areas is often huge.

As an example, the following photos compare the downtown core with the Golden Triangle Mall which shows that parking at the outskirts of the mall on a busy day and walking its length would cover over a mile in downtown, within easy reach for any healthy adult or child.

The difference in the perceived distance is that while in the parking lot, the mall provides a clear target for the pedestrian – and the perceived distance is smaller. When inside the mall, the area is full of amenities for pedestrians – the environment is shady and cool, there is seating and food, and there are lots of shops with interesting displays. In fact, malls were designed to replicate the environment of successful downtowns.

Therefore, part of downtown's success is through maximizing on-street parking, and placing sufficient parking facilities throughout the downtown in sufficient number to meet parking demand.



The Denton downtown plan encourages a pedestrian friendly environment.

But part of that strategy is to create a better walking environment for the downtown uses – creating shady, cool streets with amenities and lots of shops. Where there are not shops along the street, clear visual clues should lead the walker to those areas that have the best pedestrian (and shopping) areas.

Parking Study

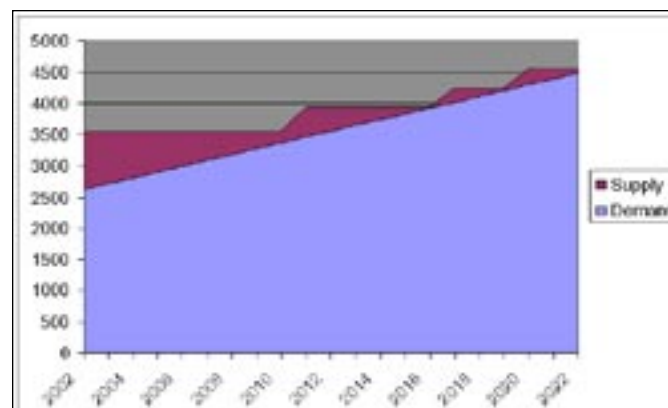
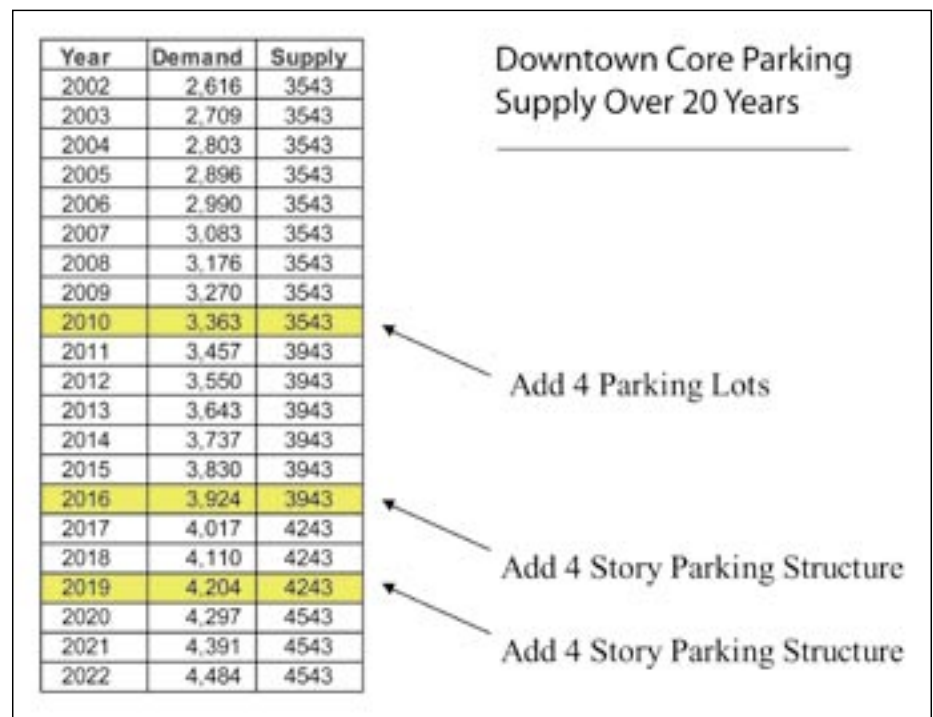
To address some of the many parking and transportation questions and issues, a study was undertaken in December, 2001. Its goal was to measure the quantity and location of parking in downtown, along with an examination of how the existing spaces were being used. As part of the study, downtown was divided into blocks with both on- and off-street parking inventoried. Spaces were counted using the city of Denton's Geographic Information System (GIS) database. Counts were double-checked against aerial photography, and in several cases, actual checks in the field were made.

The inventory showed us that there are nearly 10,800 parking spaces within Denton's downtown. The majority (9,731)

is located within private parking lots, followed by 751 on-street parallel spaces and an additional 313 spaces of on-street diagonal parking.

Survey takers walked sub-districts of downtown at three different times. The morning count

showed parking patterns related to the morning journey to work. The afternoon count found parking patterns related to uses during work hours and during prime shopping hours. And finally, the evening count told us what people were doing after the workday was done.



Based on the forecast increase in demand, we recommend that surface lots sufficient for 400 spaces (about 4 acres) be acquired in the next eight to 10 years, with a size and configuration sufficient to accommodate a parking structure.

Parking Use

■ Measuring Demand

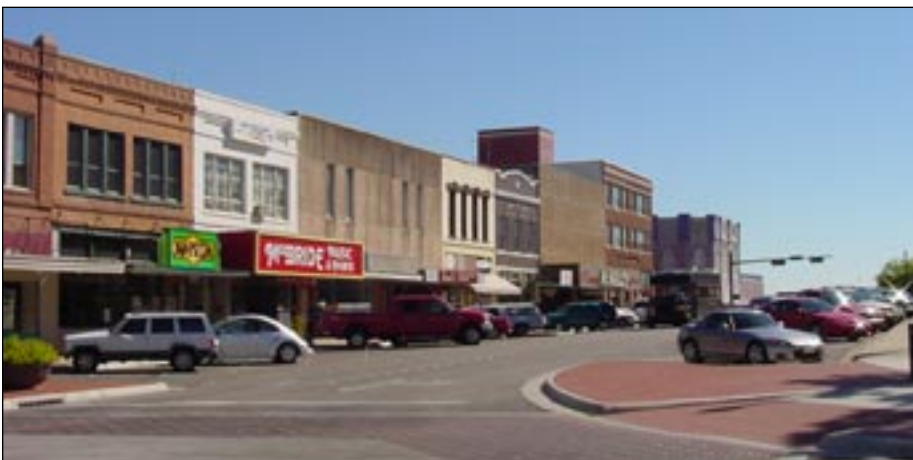
Existing demand was measured against the existing supply described above. For each parcel, the total parking demand at any given time of day can be estimated. Parking demand was generated by multiplying parking generation rates, categorized by use, with building square footages. In the suburban parking model, adding the peak time of day parking demand for each parcel in the downtown reveals the amount of parking supply necessary to meet demand. Since each major business provides enough parking to meet peak demand, each parcel essentially functions as a parking

island. This total parcel-by-parcel parking demand is estimated at 11,947 spaces – for a theoretical deficit (demand minus supply) of roughly 1,100 spaces. No doubt it comes as no surprise to many residents and businesses that Denton has a small deficit of downtown parking. However, this is not unusual in downtowns, and many do quite well on even less parking.

The Downtown Core actually has a surplus of parking – only 2,600 spaces required and over 3,500 available in the core area. Most people going downtown look for parking either at, or across the street from, the historic square. The parking study showed that this area indeed operates at close to maximum capacity at several points throughout the day. However, what many visitors fail to notice are the many spaces located just one or two blocks away. Some are in private lots that are not available after hours, even though there is no competing use. Clearly, a shared parking system in the Downtown core could greatly improve the business climate.



Areas shown in red represent limited parking supply.

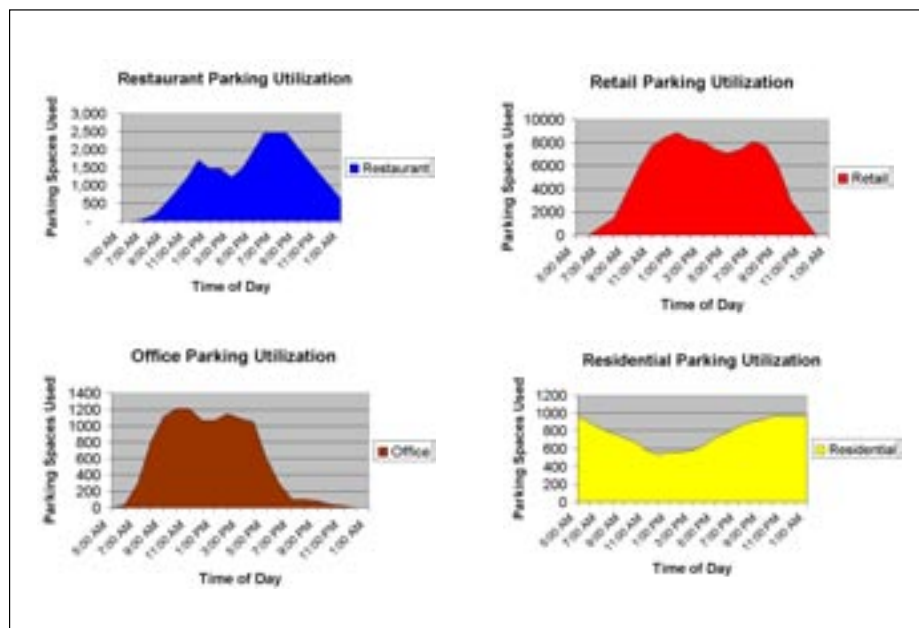


Parking spaces on the square are important the businesses in the core, this plan will not reduce the number of existing spaces.

Shared Parking

Parking can be viewed from two different models: a suburban model and a town-oriented or shared model. In most suburban settings, each individual business provides enough parking to satisfy its individual peak parking demand. This is akin to each individual household providing a well for its individual water needs. The unfortunate consequence of this parking situation is that for much of the day, most parking supply sits unoccupied. An office building, for example, may need 30 parking spaces to accommodate the peak parking demand that occurs during regular business hours, but after

6 p.m., nearly all these parking spaces will sit unused. Ironically, an adjacent restaurant may, at 7 p.m., be reaching its own parking peak with demand well overstepping the restaurant's on-site parking supply. In a town setting where individual firms are located close together, parking can be used as a shared utility, like a municipal water service. This makes good business sense as well – since people can park in one location and visit a range of nearby businesses. Employees in an office building, for example, may leave their cars parked throughout the day and walk to a nearby restaurant or to do some shopping. Under this model, one parking space easily can serve two or three businesses.



Each land use has its own unique parking demand curve.

Parking Generation

Rates were obtained
from the Urban Land
Institute (ULI).

In the shared parking model, each business shares its parking to varying degrees. Parking can be shared block by block, where each block is a parking island, or it can be shared as a common area throughout the downtown.

Shared parking by block is calculated by summing the total demand of uses on the block and measuring this at various times of day. The time of day with the highest total parking demand is the block's peak demand. If parking is shared on a block-to-block basis downtown, 13% percent fewer parking spaces are required versus the suburban model.

Shared Parking Policies and Decisions

Changing people's attitudes toward shared parking may take a bit of coaxing and convincing. Like nearly anything in life, convincing people to change their old habits frequently meets with initial resistance. But showing and explaining how shared parking can create a better downtown for everyone should go a long way toward helping people overcome their reluctance to change.

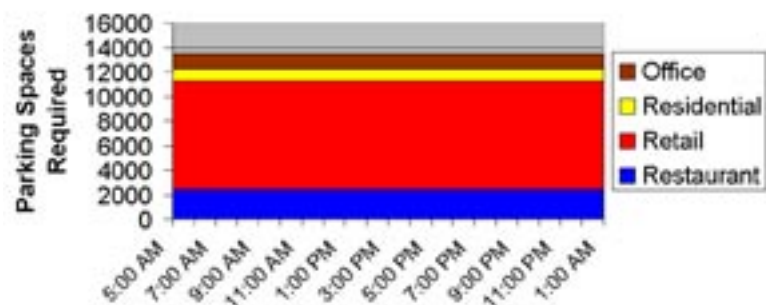
Creating shared parking in the short term may require policies that:

- ◆ Encourage sharing among businesses and devise mechanisms for addressing logistical issues. Some businesses should share parking at all times of day, while other businesses should share parking after their individual peak time of day. Also, equity issues may need to be resolved between existing businesses that have either an oversupply or undersupply of parking.

No Sharing: Every use must provide parking for their individual peak demand.



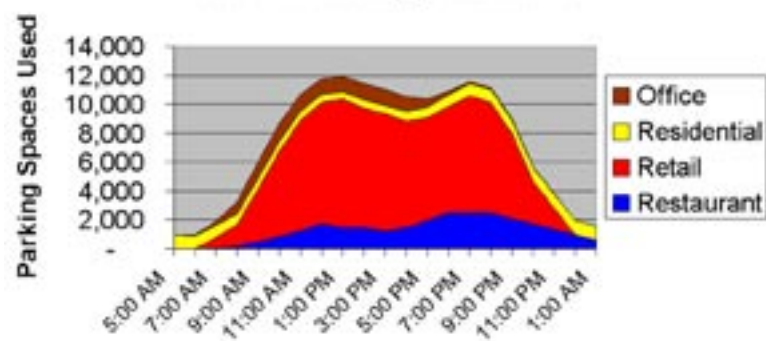
Required Minimum Parking



Sharing: Parking supply must meet the total peak of all adjacent land uses.



Shared Parking Utilization



- ◆ Encourage customers to use shared parking. A signage strategy may be needed to tell drivers that parking is shared among merchants and to point the way to large, common parking areas away from the town square.

- ◆ Establish municipal or cooperative parking facilities. Land currently owned by the City of Denton could be improved to provide parking, or new land could be acquired.

- ◆ Identify critical parking areas and encourage short-term parking there. The conflict between employee and customer parking downtown may need to be addressed in such areas, since employees tend to use spaces for longer periods that may discourage customer and tourist use.

Long-term policies may need to:

- ◆ Plan for the appropriate amount and location of necessary parking supply. These decisions will be based on the estimated evaluation of need but also will be based on site-by-site considerations. These include

locating sites nearest to intense parking demand and the type and configuration of adjacent land uses. (See table on page 9)

- ◆ Determine the timing of parking need. When should land be purchased and parking structures developed?

- ◆ Encourage walking. An excellent way to encourage customers to use one parking space while visiting several businesses is to encourage walking. One way to do this is by improving site design and architecture to make walking a pleasant, safe experience.



This mixed-use development is a perfect example of how a multi-story parking garage can fit into an existing downtown.

Parking Demand and Solution

The area in most need of a parking solution is the Downtown Core. This area of about 100 acres is the heart of the downtown. While other parts of the downtown have sufficient off street parking for most demand, the core depends, more than any other part of the downtown, on a shared parking strategy. Therefore, we recommend that the strategy for additional parking be focused on the core area.

Shared parking strategies usually depend on at least 15 percent to 25 percent of an area's parking being available to the general public. This can be achieved in several ways, but the following are some recommended strategies for the Denton downtown plan:

- 1) Maximize on-street parking by providing diagonal and parallel parking spaces where feasible. These spaces should be time limited so that downtown customers, rather than employees or business owners, use them.
- 2) Encourage private parking lots to be available to the public after hours or during off-peak times. An example often seen in other downtowns are bank parking lots used after hours as parking for restaurants and entertainment venues. Private parking lot owners can be encouraged to participate by having neighboring businesses provide liability insurance and cleanup services during off hours.
- 3) Provide adequate public off-street parking to handle the shared parking demand. While there presently is adequate parking, with the downtown's anticipated growth, this supply will be exhausted in eight or 10 years. Currently, there is estimated demand for 2,600 in the downtown core, and the supply is 3,400. Based on the forecast increase in demand (see chart on page 9), we recommend that surface lots sufficient for 400 spaces (about 4 acres) be acquired in the next eight to 10 years, with a size and configuration sufficient to accommodate a parking structure. As the downtown continues to grow, parking structures can be added over time. Other cities have found that including pedestrian-friendly uses in the ground floor (such as small cafes, shops and services) is extremely beneficial in eliminating the "dead zone" that can occur around a parking facility.
- 4) Develop parking facilities at the edge of the "10-minute walk" from Courthouse Square – about half a mile. This is the maximum distance most people will walk in the United States. Designing the intervening streets to be pedestrian-friendly areas will encourage shopping and strolling.

The parking facilities can be funded through a tax increment district or a public improvement district, as detailed later.

The Downtown Master Street Plan

At the core of this plan is developing a way to use downtown streets more effectively. Streets take up about 34% percent of downtown Denton's entire acreage, by far the largest publicly owned spaces in the downtown. They are well designed for through traffic but can be used much more effectively for other uses. Downtown streets should be viewed as multiple-use facilities, providing the following needs:

- ◆ Routes for through traffic
- ◆ Access to local businesses and residents
- ◆ Transit routes and stops
- ◆ On-street parking
- ◆ Pedestrian travel
- ◆ Sidewalk activities, including sidewalk seating for restaurants and limited advertising and merchandising.

Most of the streets downtown have 80-foot rights-of-way, and a few have 60-foot rights-of-way (Austin, Walnut, Cedar, and Pecan). The current typical cross section has very wide travel lanes with relatively narrow sidewalks. There are few areas with trees or shade and no comprehensive design for shade or weather protection. Also, there are few streets that are wide enough for sidewalk activities such as outdoor eating and limited signage – the kind of amenities that encourage walking, shopping and an overall lively atmosphere.

As part of the plan, there are several alternative designs for improving these important rights-of-way. Each of these designs makes more efficient use of the available right-of-way, reallocating

wasted space into additional parking or sidewalk width. In addition, comprehensive shade and weather protection strategies are envisioned, with a formal street tree program and ways to encourage shade-producing awnings, porticoes and balconies.

In addition, a master street plan is included that shows the ultimate desired street cross section for a particular street. While it will take many years for all the streets to be completed, this master plan is intended to represent the policy decision of what the street ultimately should become. In this way, annual street improvements will provide constant upgrades to the downtown environment, as well as less disruption and expense than if the improvements occurred piecemeal.



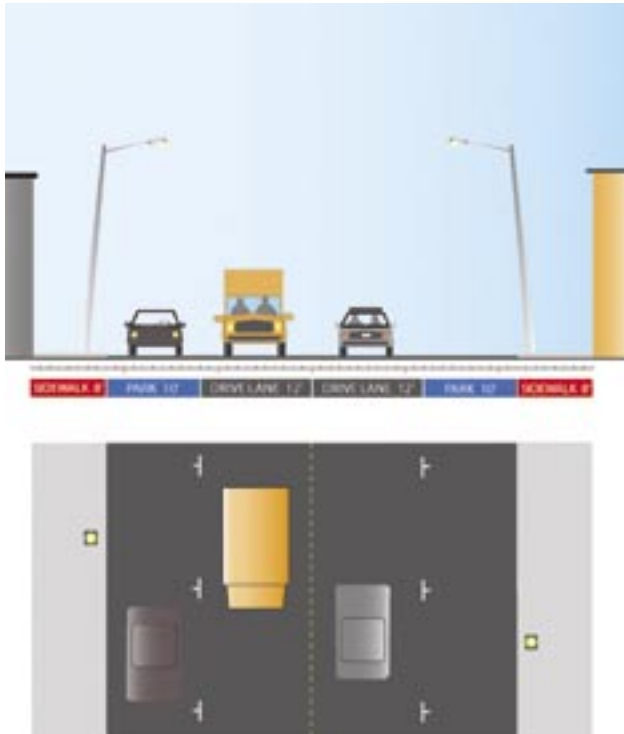
Utilizing diagonal spaces is an efficient way to create additional parking.

Downtown Denton - Proposed Street Sections



Downtown Master Street Plan Cross-Sections

EXISTING 60FT ROW



RECOMMENDED 60FT ROW #1



RECOMMENDED 60FT ROW #2

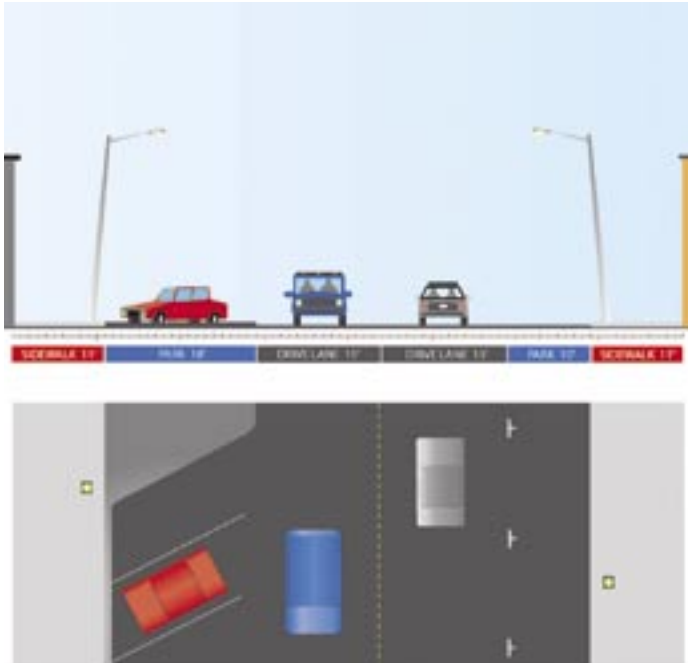


RECOMMENDED 60FT ROW #3



Downtown Master Street Plan Cross-Sections

EXISTING 80FT ROW



RECOMMENDED 80FT ROW #1



RECOMMENDED 80FT ROW #2



RECOMMENDED 80FT ROW



Transit – Transit Center and Other Opportunities

Today Denton’s public transportation system, LINK, has many of its routes available throughout the downtown, as do most successful transit systems. But the downtown’s role in LINK should be bolstered further as future growth outlined in this plan materializes – with downtown becoming the primary local transit hub for northern Denton County. In addition, it is planned in the long term that commuter rail transit service to Dallas will be extended to Denton. It makes sense, then, to begin planning for and designing the transit facilities that will link the downtown to the rest of the community and to the rest of the metroplex.

Local

Local transit service currently provides the bulk of its service to downtown. However, we recommend that transit service in the downtown be concentrated on the streets leading to the square, so that multiple lines can converge. While we do not

recommend a transit hub on the square, many of the streets just off the square provide good opportunities. These streets can be specially designed with improved shelters and bus pullouts to improve transit and traffic service.

In addition, we recommend implementing a “fareless square” in the downtown area, so that any bus can be ridden in the downtown for short distances without charge.



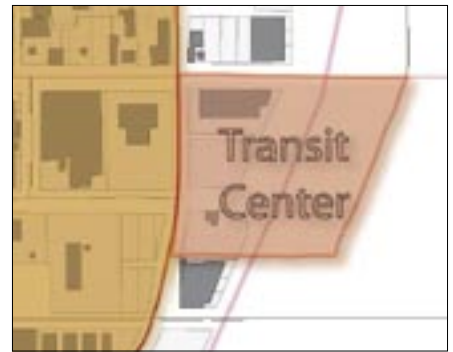
Existing transit route map.



*Proposed “fareless square” map.
This map depicts transit streets which include: Oak, Hickory, Elm, and Locust.*

Regional

Providing regional transit to the downtown is an important link. Regional and local transit services should converge at a single spot, where transit transfers can be made and interaction between buses, trams and train transit can occur safely and easily. In addition, train transit in Denton probably will require substantial park-and-ride and drop off facilities.



The transit center therefore will need to be a fairly substantial facility, with provision for train, bus, auto, and pedestrian use. It should be within walking distance to the downtown core, but it should be sufficiently removed so that the heavy vehicle traffic does not disrupt the downtown environment.

The ideal location would be the old Denton Passenger Rail Station – the historic train station for Denton, originally constructed in 1897 and demolished in 1960. Reconstructing the facility as a transit hub would provide access to downtown for a variety of uses in the downtown, from the proposed arts walk on Hickory Street to a proposed downtown conference center. At the same time, the surrounding uses such as City Hall East and the Denton Courthouse would provide other important access points.



*Above: Existing Conditions - Proposed Transit Center.
Below: An example of an existing inter-modal transit center.*



ECONOMICS

A sound economic development strategy is critical to the success of Denton's downtown plan. A strong economic development strategy will enhance the downtown's ability to attract and recruit retail, office and residential development. By analyzing downtown Denton's economic base – including growth and decline in employment sectors, zoning, analysis of potential redevelopment sites, market overviews and key informant interviews – strategies to induce development potential and growth can be formulated. These strategies outline methods that will attract and retain employment, encourage redevelopment of under-used sites, strengthen the downtown's position as a center for regional retail activities, and improve the community's quality of life.

Procuring anchor projects and undertaking streetscape beautification are the first steps to jumpstart economic interest in downtown real estate. Downtown Denton real estate markets will respond positively to these important economic programs. Continued

assistance from the city – through programs such as investments in the public infrastructure and amenities of the downtown, cooperating in specific area plans, project packaging assistance, relaxing certain building code requirements to stimulate upper level housing, and other similar public assistance techniques – also will stimulate economic growth.

A realistic assessment of the market potential for Denton's historic downtown area is a critical element of the downtown master plan. Knowing the types of development most likely to occur in the area will help guide local planning decisions now and in the future.

Based on Denton County central appraisal district records, the total square footage for the downtown study area is about 2.6 million square feet. Of this figure, 82 percent of the square footage is commercial property, while 18 percent is residential. The downtown area has remained healthy with a relatively high occupancy rate (90-100 percent), especially in the historic square (99-100 percent) district.

Forecast for Downtown Growth

Forecasting the downtown's possible growth during the next 20 years is difficult. Under current trends, the downtown would see little change; and perhaps employment and population would even decline. However, this plan is intended to increase the downtown's share of Denton County's regional prosperity. Developing this plan requires making some assumptions about how much growth is reasonable for the future. The assumptions we will use are for 1.5 million square feet of commercial building, 500 new housing units, and 250 new hotel rooms.

The range of possibilities is best considered when the downtown is seen in context with possible employment growth in Denton County. The county has tripled in size in the last 20 years – from a population of 146,000 in 1980 to more than 437,000 today. Employment grew even faster, from 51,000 to 169,000 jobs during that same time period. While there is no historic downtown information in 1980, the general consensus is that

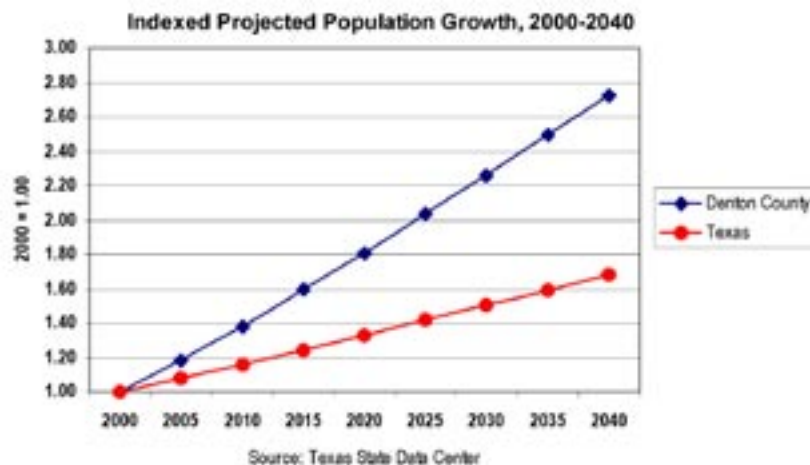
downtown did not keep pace with Denton County, growing little during this time.

Denton County is forecast to nearly double in size during the next 20 years, growing to a population of 757,000. Employment is expected to keep pace, growing to nearly 300,000 jobs by 2020.

This plan is intended to increase the downtown's share of Denton County's regional prosperity.

Population & Employment Chart

Area	1995	2025	Numeric Growth	Percent Growth
City of Denton				
Population	62,450	132,700	70,250	112%
Households	26,950	51,700	24,750	92%
Jobs	41,700	65,850	24,150	58%
Denton County				
Population	320,550	794,000	473,450	148%
Households	117,000	293,900	176,900	151%
Jobs	94,750	244,800	150,050	158%



While much attention is given to the growth of manufacturing jobs, most of the employment growth (65 percent) will be in the fields of services, retail, and financial, insurance and real estate. These are areas where healthy downtowns traditionally can compete with suburban locations for a share of the new jobs – healthy downtowns can absorb from 15 percent to 30 percent of regional job growth. Given the forecast of 85,000 new jobs in this sector, a 10 percent market share is an attainable goal for Denton. This would result in an increase of 8,500 jobs during a 20-year period in the area covered by the downtown plan, or about 425 new jobs per year.

While there is no data for the amount of growth that occurs through infill or expansion of existing buildings, experience shows that 45 percent to 80 percent of new employment growth in downtowns is absorbed into existing buildings through redevelopment. It appears that Denton could absorb a considerable amount of new employment growth in existing buildings, especially in second floors, or by replacing existing uses with more ones that are

more employment intensive. As a result, we estimate that about 50 percent of the new employment growth will result in new buildings, or approximately 1,500,000 new square feet in building – about 75,000 square feet per year, on average.

In addition, with the forecast increase of more than 125,000 new households in Denton County, there could be demand for at least 1 percent for mixed-use, downtown housing. In fact, many urban areas now see from 3 percent to 5 percent of total housing demand as part of the so-called “urban” product – rentals of condos in or near downtown locations – from traditional downtowns like Houston’s, to new downtowns such as Addison Circle in the Dallas area. This housing product is available in small quantities in downtown Denton, but demand is strong,

and other Texas cities have had considerable success in developing a downtown market. The estimate, then, is that 500 to 1,000 units of downtown area housing is reasonable.

As for hotels, we estimate that the minimum of 250 rooms would be attracted by a revitalized downtown and would include a conference and performing arts center. For the purposes of planning the land-use, transportation and parking needs of a revitalized downtown, we have used the following development program (see table below).

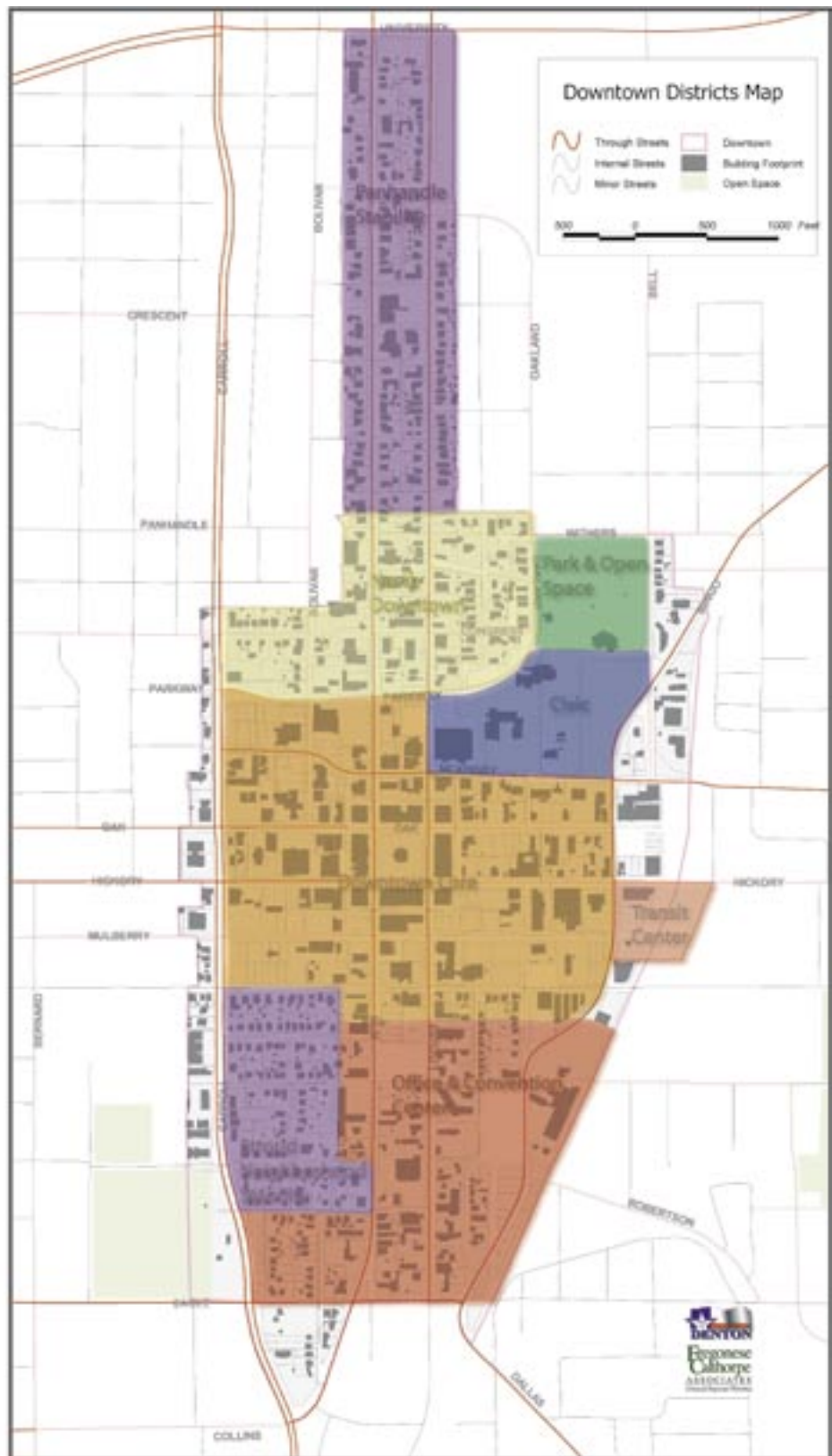
While this is higher than what is reflected in recent trends, this amounts to only 8,500 jobs out of a total of more than 130,000 in the next 20 years. That represents only 6.5 percent of the total.

Development Program Table

	Size of Project		
Retail	400,000	(sq. ft. GFA)	400,000
Restaurant	75,000	(sq. ft. GFA)	75,000
Office	700,000	(sq. ft. GFA)	700,000
Residential	500	(# bedrooms)	400000
Hotel	200		100000
Total	1,175,700		1,675,000

SUB-AREA PLANS

One of the workshop results was to divide the downtown plan into sub-areas – since there are several areas that are part of the downtown but have different circumstances, needs, policies and investment opportunities. There are two broad categories of sub-areas: those that are likely to undergo “little” change, and those likely to see “major” change.



Sub-areas With Little Change

Two sub-areas that likely will undergo little change are the Elm and Locust areas (a panhandle that extends from the downtown to University) and the Stroud neighborhood (a fairly intact neighborhood of homes in the downtown area).



Elm and Locust Area

Elm and Locust streets will see substantial redevelopment and infill, especially with a revitalized downtown. However, the streetscape is well designed for the area with sidewalks and street trees, and the current Denton Development Code provides an appropriate mix of uses and development standards. With good access to the downtown and TWU, it already fulfills its role as a gateway to the downtown and essentially is ready for additional infill. Therefore, the plan has little to add to this area that has not already been done.

Stroud Neighborhood

The Stroud neighborhood is an area of primarily single-family homes. This neighborhood is well developed, with potential for small-scale residential infill.



Similarly to the Elm and Locust area, it has appropriate zoning and sufficient development standards, and therefore needs little additional work in this plan. It will prosper as the downtown is revitalized and develops but should remain a quiet residential area in the downtown.

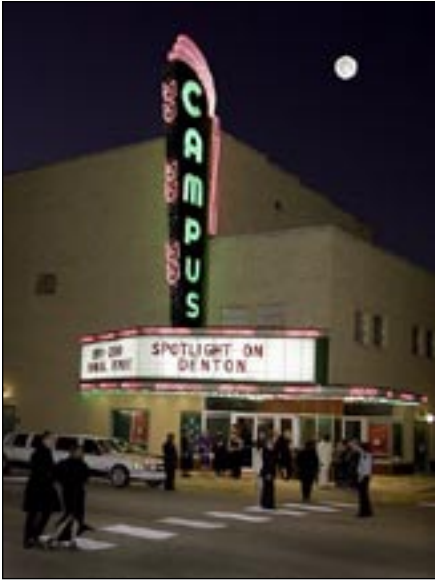
The DR-I zoning requirements should be referenced for infill size and density when considering small-scale residential infill in the Stroud Neighborhood.

Sub-areas With Major Change

Denton Core

■ Major Advantages

Denton's core is the heart of the downtown. It contains the most successful group of business uses and currently is the area with the highest rents, indicating the most success for locating businesses. This core contains historic buildings and some of the best new buildings in the downtown. Any revitalization will need to start here and spread outward. There are, however, some significant issues that must be addressed to expand the downtown's vitality.



"Spotlight on Denton"



■ Major Problems

The downtown suffers from some problems that prevent successful revitalization from spreading much beyond Courthouse Square. One major problem is the streetscape, which contains few pedestrian amenities. Ideally, the streetscape should provide a basic range of amenities, such as trees for shade, a wider variety of uses and buildings near the sidewalk, and some daily activity on the sidewalks to spur greater pedestrian movement. The plan should address this area as a beginning point.

The four narrow streets around the square (list) have no street trees but unfortunately do have trash containers in the street itself. Because they function in a sense as alleys, with access to the backs of buildings for delivery, utilities, and waste, they provide difficult design challenges. On the plus side, they are very wide for alleys and have business frontages as well. These streets need a comprehensive design solution that will retain the access needs of the businesses but provide a pleasant environment as well.

In addition, this area is one of the few in downtown with a parking deficit throughout the day. Additional parking should be provided here first, by redesigning the streets into diagonal parking (increasing the parking capacity by 50 percent) and providing new public parking lots at the periphery of the core area.

■ Proposed Plan

Streetscape Solution

The master street plan proposes a design solution that improves the parking, trash and sidewalk environment while retaining adequate traffic capacity. The plan can accommodate on most streets a capacity for activities such as sidewalk seating for restaurants and some limited merchandise displays that encourage walking. In some areas, it also provides for consolidated waste containers, which are screened from view.

The Hickory Street Art Walk is a proposal that fits into this category – the idea is to encourage galleries, restaurants and other uses to concentrate on Hickory Street – the

proposed street improvements will compliment the idea of a street for strolling, and this will also lead to additional business development in the Downtown.

Shared Parking

Proposed parking facilities have not been located, as they may need to be purchased from private parties. However, this plan recommends acquiring public parking areas at the periphery of the downtown core. In addition, several current parking lots have limited use during the day but could be available in the evening. The plan recommends developing city policies and programs to encourage those business to provide public access parking after hours, in exchange for insurance coverage and lot maintenance.



The active fountain should be located within a two block radius of the square. It should be situated in a plaza setting of no less than 10,000 square feet. Ideally it would be fronted by two story buildings occupied by shops, small businesses and housing.

Shade and Cool (Porticoes, Awnings, Balconies)

Shading downtown streets is essential in Denton's warm climate. Traditionally, city cores in hot climates have extensive shade-producing devices, such as awnings. In addition, some downtowns allow or even encourage the construction of balconies or porticoes that extend over the sidewalk, providing both shade and additional square footage to the buildings. These require a permit for construction in the public right-of-way, but encourage the retail, hotel or restaurant use in the second stories – currently under used in many existing buildings. While it may not be appropriate in



Shade from an awning helps to create a pleasant sidewalk cafe.

the historic square, on many surrounding streets this would provide both shade and an inducement to invest in new or redeveloped buildings.

Active Fountain

Many downtowns in hot climates provide fountains as a way of cooling the air, masking traffic noise, and providing a gathering spot. While it doesn't provide a specific location, this plan recommends that a fountain be developed as a way to meet all three goals. In recent years, active interactive fountains have become popular. These often become popular gathering spots in the summer, providing an attraction to the community for an entertaining evening downtown. This facility would greatly enhance the downtown as a destination for people and families in Denton.



Families enjoy cooling down in a public fountain.

■ North Downtown

Major Advantages

The north downtown area has many advantages – its proximity to the core, Civic Center Park, TWU, and the popular “Cupboard Natural Foods and Cafe” (downtown’s only grocery store). It also is an area with lower rents, providing opportunities for new businesses and residents.

Major Disadvantages

Its disadvantages include some buildings that are under used and somewhat run down, a lack of a defining character, and a poor streetscape with narrow sidewalks.

Solution

This area lends itself to a mixture of uses but is especially attractive for residential or mixed uses. It also is attractive for small offices, again with a complementary mix of uses. The current zoning permits this with fairly liberal parking standards, and with a slight increase in rents redeveloping some parcels is financially feasible.

The street improvements proposed here primarily are wider sidewalks and street trees,

which lend themselves to the mixture of land uses envisioned for this area.

The Civic Center provides a large green space, as well as civic uses, in the midst of the downtown area. The park uses in particular should be enhanced and the master plan for the Civic Center park implemented.



Example of a mixed-use building in Houston, TX.



■ South Downtown (Conference & Performing Arts Center)

Major Advantages

The south downtown area has some of the major advantages in the downtown – it is relatively undeveloped or has low value buildings, is within easy walking distance to the downtown and is close to UNT. It currently has some transit service and is close to the new proposed transit center at the Denton Passenger Train Station. Because of this, it has a high reinvestment potential. In our redevelopment analysis, this area would be most likely to attract reinvestment.



*Above: Example of a successful conference and performing arts center.
Below: Location map of hotel and conference and performing arts center.*



Major Disadvantages

Conversely, this area also has the greatest existing disadvantages. Its current perception of low value in the marketplace makes reinvestment under existing conditions unlikely. It has some major infrastructure problems. Like other areas in the downtown, it would benefit from streetscape improvements. However, it also has major drainage and flooding problems. When away from the area's major streets, the casual shopper has little incentive to visit the area. Some of the uses are somewhat incompatible with a resurgent downtown, although small-scale manufacturing could co-exist with other downtown uses.

Solution

This area would benefit most from a more proactive approach by the City of Denton. Assuming that a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) is formed, several major initiatives would boost this area's potential.

Acquire and assemble sites in the area of the Pecan Creek floodway.

This would allow the City to resolve a long-standing flood hazard and also to assemble sites for some of the larger uses proposed in this plan.

Develop a business plan for a combined arts and conference center.

Denton has long expressed a need and desire for a performing arts and conference center. This area would be close to the downtown square and also to the transit center – providing mutual benefits for everyone. A large site could be assembled that would make its development feasible.

It appears that further investigation is well warranted. A preliminary study by TIP Strategies (Appendix B) reached the following conclusions:

- ◆ The size and strength of the Denton economy strongly suggests that more meeting space would be beneficial to the city.
- ◆ There is a sufficient economic base to support public events, lectures, exhibitions and trade shows.



Above: Acquisition of Pecan Creek floodway.
Below: Conference center examples.



- ◆ The county is home to a number of major corporations that could serve as an excellent source of meeting activity.

- ◆ Most major employers interviewed for this study indicated an interest in using a new meeting facility in the city.

- ◆ Parking was seen as a key concern if such a facility were to be located downtown.

- ◆ From the standpoint of attracting outside events, Denton faces competition for convention activity within the Metroplex.

- ◆ Lack of a resort-quality hotel presents another obstacle to the success of a conference and performing arts center in Denton.

- ◆ The presence of a high-end hotel could serve to create a destination that would make the area more attractive to meeting planners.

◆ Our preliminary analysis indicates that Denton should proceed with a more detailed study regarding the construction of a conference and performing arts center as part of its downtown plan.

◆ However, there are several conditions that should be met to ensure the success of such a facility, including: linkage to a broader community plan (that incorporates enhanced parking, pedestrian access, and support from surrounding amenities), connection to a hotel, a flexible and scalable design, and an

aggressive marketing plan. Therefore, it would be an important first step to develop a financial strategy and support mechanism for this facility.

Develop this area as a combined conference center and performing arts center, with additional uses of a major hotel and possible local museums

Assuming that the business plan works, several sites could be developed with the following uses: a combined conference and performing arts center, a high quality hotel, and a local museum. These could provide a venue for some of the wide variety cultural and entertainment activities already in Denton many of which are already experiencing space issues. This investment would provide a stimulus to the immediate surrounding area, as well as the rest of the downtown.

Streetscape solution: The streetscape solution is to rebuild the local streets with a cross section that would add wider sidewalks, street trees and diagonal parking.



Aerial photo of Downtown Denton.

OVERALL BENEFITS OF THE PLAN

If this plan is implemented, there will be many benefits to the downtown and to the entire city, including the following:

The improvements anticipated by this plan would cover 1.5 million square feet, and be assessed at over 125 million dollars.

While this has definite economic advantages, the reasons to have a vital downtown are also difficult to quantify. Downtowns are a source of community pride and identity.

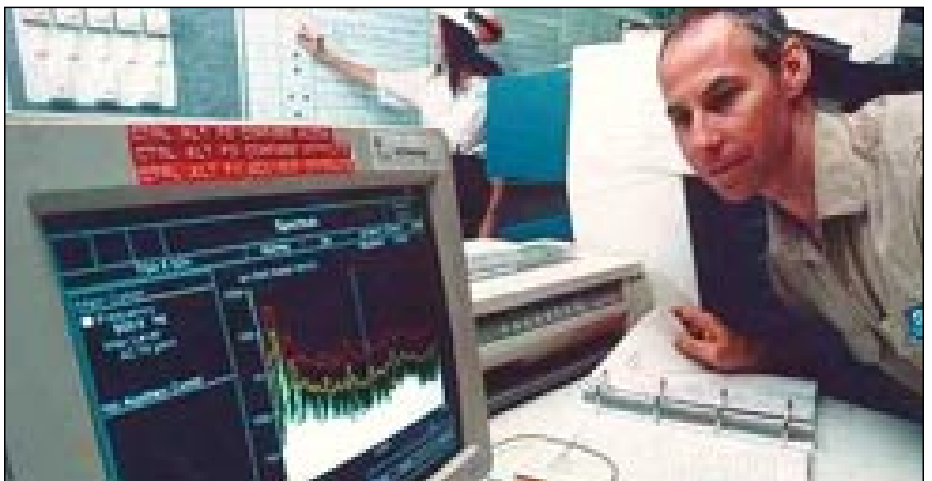
The Creative Industries. One of the benefits of an active downtown is that it tends to attract people with a creative bent. While different things attract industries, one of the most important in our technology driven world is creativity. And industries that need creative people tend to locate in communities that cater to them. Austin, a good example of this in Texas, attracts people with a variety of amenities – a thriving musical scene, ethnic and cultural diversity, and great outdoor recreation. The author Richard

Florida has ranked several cities in regards to their ability to attract creative people, and in Texas, Austin, Dallas and Houston all made the top ten (along with such places as San Diego and Chapel Hill, North Carolina.). To quote Mr. Florida, “Places that are successful in attracting and retaining the creative class prosper, those that fail don’t.”

The plan’s implementation would change the appearance of the downtown, not radically, but while keeping its essential character, it would become much more desirable and attractive.

Employment would increase by 8,500, yielding an annual payroll of over \$200 million dollars.

With two large universities, a head start in music, and positioned to provide the benefits of being close to Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex without the headaches, Denton can thrive as a center of the creative industries – some of the best paying in the future. A thriving Downtown with places to work, live, and play may be much more valuable than just the business it generates – it would lift Denton on the radar screen of places that creative people, and the industries that employ them, live and work.



A key benefit of the plan is the increase of employment opportunities in the downtown area.

Street Scape Improvements - 60ft ROW

EXISTING CONDITIONS

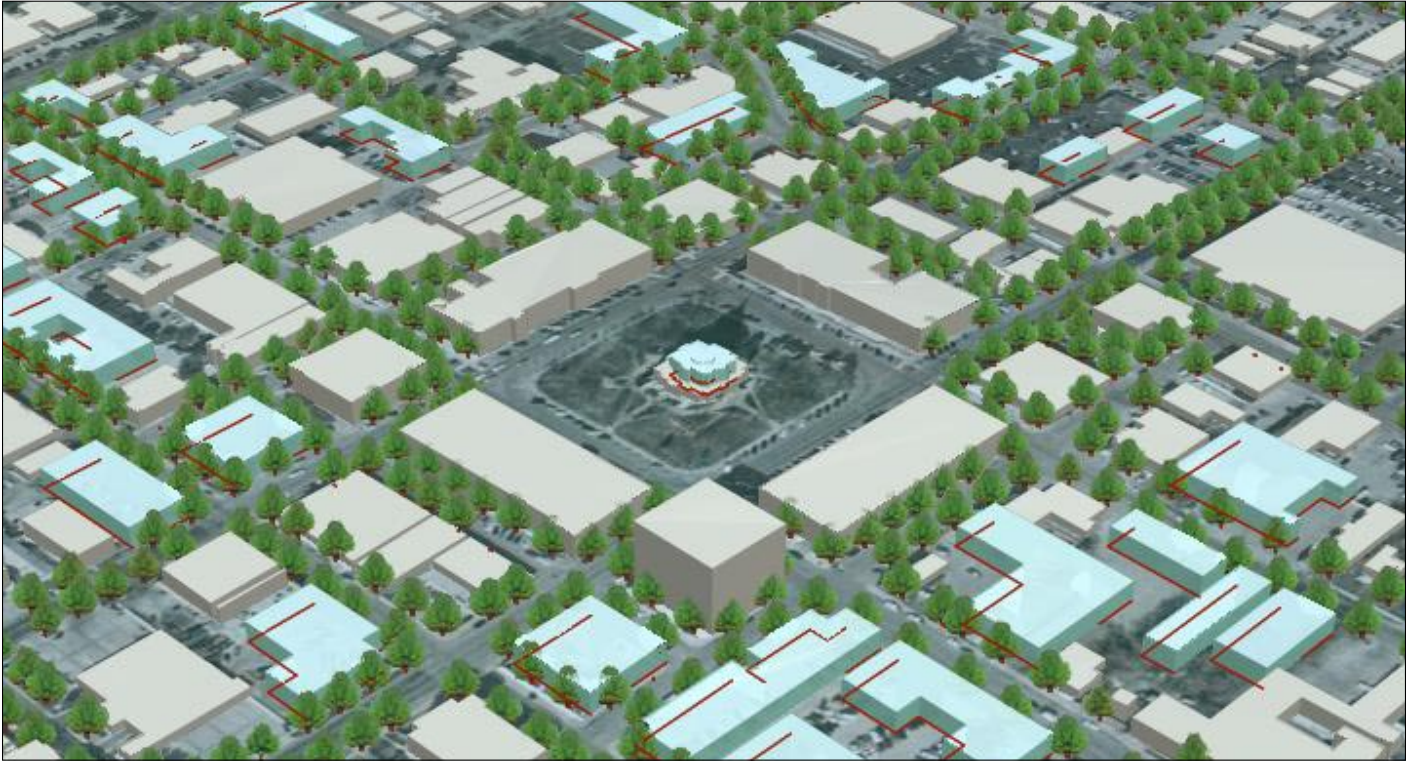


Street Scape Improvements - 80ft ROW

EXISTING CONDITIONS



Aerial Perspective - Downtown Core



IMPLEMENTATION

Any plan is only as good as its implementation. This plan is designed to produce change. Therefore, the challenge of achieving the vision of the plan falls to a step by step process that builds momentum on its success. If the first steps are not successful, it will be difficult to maintain momentum. Therefore, the plan is designed to start with some significant, but short term and inexpensive steps. The plan then lays a strategy for the financing of the longer term, more significant steps. These steps will be several years away, but by then the potential of the Downtown should be obvious.

The incremental approach also allows for adjustments in changes to the market, to which ideas are working, and to respond to the changing economic forces that will be at work in a dynamic downtown. Like the ancient martial art of jujitsu, the momentum of the downtown should be used to carry it forward with more energy than starting from a dead stop.

The Strategies are divided into Regulations, Public Investments, Long Term Improvements, Partnerships, and Financing Tools

Regulation

Zoning

For this plan to be effective, several key steps should be taken. Often, downtown plans need to undergo a major rezoning or develop an entirely new zoning code. However, since Denton recently underwent a major revision of its development code, this is not necessary. This presents a major advantage that many cities do not enjoy.

Denton's current code permits all the uses envisioned in the plan and includes parking and development standards appropriate to downtown. The only suggestion that should be investigated is a special development code for the downtown core – those blocks that face the square and the surrounding “alley” streets. As noted earlier, this is an area that could benefit from more explicit architectural guidelines. Specific codes and ordinances resulting from the plan require genuine understanding and consensus by stakeholders.



Mixed-use designs such as this, provide the setting for friendly interaction and public safety in Downtown Denton.

Sidewalk Use Regulation

Other regulatory changes that should be implemented are those that govern the use of the public rights-of-way in the downtown. These are of two types: those that regulate and allow architectural projections over the public right-of-way (namely, arcades, porticoes, and balconies), and those that regulate the temporary use of the sidewalk for commercial enterprise (such as sidewalk restaurants, signs, displays of merchandise, and vending carts).



This plan recommends that regulations be adopted for permits that allow sidewalk seating

■ Architectural Projections Permits

This plan encourages the extension of shade-producing structures over the sidewalk, especially where those sidewalks are widened to more than 10 feet. While shallow awnings do not need supports, shade protection that covers the sidewalk often can involve supports on the sidewalk in the form of columns. These should be permitted with certain conditions, namely ensuring that the public use of the sidewalk continues, that there is sufficient clearance both vertically and horizontally, and that the conditions for their temporary or permanent removal is spelled out when it applies to a public right-of-way.

A balcony also may be formed to provide shade and also a unique seating area on the second story. These often are useful for restaurants and hotels and can stimulate development within second stories of buildings. These structures should be covered by a sidewalk use permit ordinance that spells out the standards and conditions of such uses and structures.

■ Sidewalk Use Permits

A second category is the use of sidewalks for commercial purposes. This is one of the easiest ways to enliven a downtown, since it draws people and activity to the sidewalk areas. Where sidewalk widths exceed 10 feet, narrow tables can be used and still allow the minimum travel width necessary (five or six feet in most jurisdictions). When the sidewalk is wider, an area can be enclosed for full table seating. In addition, some small “A-frame” signs can be accommodated.

On a cautionary note, however, this type of signage should be regulated. Competition for customers may lead to chaos and overly aggressive displays. This plan recommends that regulations be adopted for permits that allow sidewalk seating, specifying the location of tables, the width of unobstructed walking area, and the owner’s responsibilities for cleaning and trash disposal. In addition, regulation of sidewalk signs should be included in a sidewalk use ordinance.

Public Investment

A major opportunity for the City to begin implementing this plan is to invest in some small targeted public improvements, while at the same time laying the foundation for the downtown to finance its own improvements through a TIRZ.

Short-term Improvement

The following should be funded and implemented within the first year of adopting this plan

■ Streetscape and trash disposal in the “alley streets” (Austin, Walnut, Cedar, and Pecan)

These four streets show the most potential for economic growth and reinvestment. However, they are hindered by the unattractive streetscape, the lack of shade and weather protection, narrow sidewalks, and the location of trash containers on the street. The City should develop a plan for consolidating trash in each block and provide a common, screened trash area.

The recommended sidewalk and parking improvements should be implemented as well, bringing attention to that area and stimulating investment. This should be seen as a demonstration project for the downtown plan, along with implementing sidewalk uses such as outdoor seating and balconies.

This plan does not advocate a major large-scale investment – but rather to create a strategy that will allow the downtown’s growth and prosperity to pay for investments.



An example of how trash can be consolidated within each block by providing a common, screened area.



■ Signage and Way Finding

The way finding map shows the preferred routes between downtown and major streets in Denton. These should be appropriately signed. On-street parking should be advertised, and public off-street spaces should be advertised as well.

■ Transit

Currently, the LINK transit system includes several routes that go thorough the downtown. These routes should be concentrated on Locust, Elm, Hickory and Oak streets, concentrating transit service in the downtown and increasing its frequency. These streets, designated as “busways,” should be next on the list for improvements, including a coordinated transit stop and shelter program. The downtown then should be declared a “fareless square” that allows riders a free ride within the downtown area. For a minimal cost the downtown can have the functional equivalent of a shuttle, and the transit system gets better visibility and an introduction to new users.

Preferred Routes to Downtown



■ Festival Streets

The streets in the square and the “alley streets” around the square should be designated “festival streets,” with plans for closing them to traffic for downtown festivals, such as Dog Days. After the streetscape improvements mentioned above have been made, these festivals are an important tool for reintroducing the downtown to Denton residents and visitors. Additional festival activities should be scheduled several times a year.



■ Farmer's Market

The festival streets and the square should be the site of the Denton farmer's market, which is a traditional downtown activity. In addition, a market that sells local handcrafted goods during the holiday season is an idea that has become popular in other downtowns.



Farmers markets help to stimulate the local economy, and provide a place for social interaction.



Downtown is not currently easily accessible from the interstate. This plan recommends smooth curved roadways from both Carroll Blvd. and Dallas Drive to ease traffic congestion on the south end of Elm and Locust Streets.

■ Access Improvements

Drawing people into the core business district is crucial to revitalizing Denton's downtown. Therefore, fast and easy access is imperative. It is necessary to get everyone - residents, employees, shoppers and visitors - in and out of downtown quickly and smoothly. Roundabouts are great tools to improve access to Denton's Downtown. Modern roundabouts are one of the safest forms of traffic control in the world; they slow vehicles and provide refuges for pedestrians, in addition to being aesthetically pleasing. Roundabouts are a popular alternative to signalized intersections, and at many



Current conditions - intersection of Eagle, Bell and Dallas Drive.

locations they move traffic much more efficiently and safely than signals.

A roundabout is recommended at the junction of Eagle, Bell and Dallas Drive, located in the southeast corner of the downtown. This intersection is a perfect candidate for a roundabout; it is a heavily utilized entrance into the core. Incorporating the roundabout with the adjacent Dallas Drive rail bridge could turn the site into a landmark or gateway into the downtown. Although a roundabout is recommended it may be necessary to explore alternate intersection improvements.



An example of a possible design for the proposed roundabout.

Long-term Improvements

In the long term, there are several activities that must be undertaken if the downtown is to reach its potential. Just as a healthy downtown requires an ongoing commitment from the City, downtown itself must develop some of its own reliable sources of income and energy. Most successful downtowns may be started by a city initiative, but their success generates both the income and the support for continued involvement. Therefore, while the short-term activities are important, a commitment for long-term solutions is more important if the downtown is to continue to grow during the next 20 years. The following activities are essential over the long term:

■ Formation of a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ)

As detailed below in the tools section, formation of the TIRZ is an important early step. Several additional steps should be taken first, including determining the necessary studies to be done, determining the location of the

area's boundaries, developing a specific plan that is part of the TIRZ formation, and appointing a board of directors to implement the TIRZ. However, this plan depends largely on the TIRZ to develop funds for ongoing improvements. The TIRZ also creates an institutional downtown structure that is important to sustain downtown activities over time.

■ Streetscape

After the initial streetscape improvements, this plan recommends that 800 linear feet be improved per year, drawing funds from the city's transportation funds, the TIRZ, and potentially from a public improvement district (PID) where needed. These improvements should be directed to that part of the downtown that

is most active in new investment and economic growth, or where the investment can be used to leverage private investment.

■ Transit

With the formation of the Denton County Transportation Authority, transit will receive more attention in Denton County. The downtown can function both as a transit hub, where local and regional transit come together, and as a source of riders and destinations. Consolidating transit lines in the downtown into bus ways and the fareless square should be expanded, and options such as bus rapid transit (a bus system that operates with some of the advantages of rail based transit, but at substantially lower costs) should be investigated as a way to enhance local transit service, as well as the downtown.



Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) has many of the advantages of a rail system at a greatly reduced cost.



■ Fountain

Placing an active fountain into the downtown area is something that should be seriously considered in the long term. The location is not specified, as its construction must be strategic. But there is no doubt that a fountain will enhance the downtown's attractiveness to the community, improve its environment (especially during hot weather), and attract residential uses in its vicinity.

■ Parking Lots and Parking Structures

While there is sufficient downtown parking in the short term, there should be plans to purchase additional surface lots with income generated from the TIRZ. These parking lots should be developed as surface lots but sized for parking structures.



Parking structures will become necessary in 10 years as the downtown's success brings in more business, but the time to purchase and plan for the land required is in the near term, before the need arises.

■ Arts and Conference Center and Hotel

One of the most ambitious parts of this plan is the idea of developing and locating an arts and conference center in the south downtown. This warrants additional examination, along with developing a business plan and pro-forma analysis for this development. And assuming such a center is feasible, the next step is acquiring the site and selecting a developer for the project.

While this may take many years to implement, the complex process and related activities should be supported by the City initially (for the studies) and eventually by the TIRZ (for property acquisition and packaging)



The “Point” in Denver is an example of partnership between two non-profits and public agencies.

Partnerships

The role of public and private partnerships is an important one for most successful downtowns. In a sense, the public investments should be timed and located in areas where the private sector is investing or has indicated an interest in investing. Public improvements such as streetscapes, parking facilities, or other improvements can encourage or even leverage private improvements in the downtown. These private improvements will create increased property tax assessments, which in turn will create more revenue for improvements under a TIRZ. Therefore, the City should develop and maintain a good

relationship with property owners, investors, and developers in the downtown so that it has accurate information on where its investments can be best leveraged by private investments.

Another tool often used by local governments in downtowns is the Specific Area Plan. This is a process where the local government or downtown Board of Directors develop a specific plan, including some preliminary architecture, for how parcels will develop. This plan, when adopted, allows construction to commence with a simple building permit application – all the approvals have been processed with the specific area plan. This is usually done in partnership with the property owners,

neighbors, other downtown interests, and sometimes the developer of the project. Costs are often shared with the owners and the developer. This allows a coordinated and unified vision to be developed without any purchase of land by the Downtown agency, and allows develop to proceed in a manner more compatible to the private sector, without ignoring other local interests. Best of all, once the plan is complete, a certain outcome and reduced red tape brings stability to surrounding neighbors and certainty to the developers. This tool should be prepared and readied, but its use needs to be strategic, responding to a short term need.

Financial Tools

Financing improvements and services to implement the downtown plan can be done with either or both of two special districts allowed under Texas law. (There are several other specialized financing mechanisms for particular types of projects, e.g., venues may be financed with a variety of special taxes. In addition, tax abatements sometimes can be used effectively for economic development).

The first special district is a tax increment reinvestment zone (TIRZ), in which all or part of the tax revenue increase over the base year is reinvested in public infrastructure within the zone. The TIRZ is the state legal term for tax increment financing, used in many cities and states. The city council establishes the zone, either from its own initiative or in response to a petition by the property owners. The property owners within the district pay the same taxes as they would if the zone did not exist; the difference is that any increment over the base year amount is set aside for the purposes listed when the TIRZ was established.

Tax increment financing is most efficient when the project being financed will generate most, if not all, of the increment. Project costs can include capital costs (the acquisition and construction of public works, public improvements, new or existing buildings, rehabilitation costs, demolition, land and clearance costs); financing costs (including all interest); real property assembly; relocation costs; professional services; and creation, organization and administrative costs. Projects that are implemented prior to an increment being realized often are financed by a developer and later are reimbursed as an increment is realized, or through the issuance of bonds. Projects also can be financed on a pay-as-you-go basis.

The TIRZ will generate the most revenue quickly if it is established when property values are low and when there is a single large development within the zone that will become feasible with the help of the TIRZ improvements.

TIRZ's can be city-initiated, if it consists of less than 10 percent residential land area, or by a petition. TIRZ's that

are created by petition must be submitted by owners of property constituting more than 50 percent of the appraised value of the area. Additional areas can be annexed into the zone at a later time through an initiative by the City, if it meets the less than 10 percent residential rule, or by property owners' petition.

Another key factor for a TIRZ is the participation of more than one taxing jurisdiction. If the City is the only one, it is simpler to have the City allocate the tax increment each year and not set up another layer. At a minimum, the County needs to participate. State law (Ch.311, Local government code) mandates the size and composition of the board of directors for a TIRZ. The City may delegate to the board any powers granted under state law, except for eminent domain and taxing powers. Powers include land-use controls, in special cases; design standards; recommendations for the administration of the zone; and, powers to implement a project and financing plan.

Public Improvement Districts (PID), or their even more powerful cousins, Municipal Management Districts (MMD), can provide infrastructure and/or services. There is no size restriction, and they can be layered. They are limited only by the willingness of property owners to pay additional taxes. The PID is established by a City in response to a petition from the property owners. The petition includes the boundaries of the district, the maximum tax rate, and a service plan and budget describing the purposes of the district.

MMDs are established by the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission in response to a petition of the property owners. The powers of an MMD are broader than those of a PID, but they are similar in the fundamental idea of property owners being allowed to tax themselves additional amounts in order to fund infrastructure and services for a special district.

It is possible to combine both a TIRZ and a PID or MMD. This has been done in several zones, for example, in the City

of Houston. If the improvements in Denton are a general package of services and infrastructure, a combination of PID/TIRZ might be the best way to get the projects built. The petitions for the TIRZ and the PID are drawn up at the same time, covering identical areas. The PID has an “up to” tax rate, with language added so that the revenue from the TIRZ is used to offset at least part of the tax in future years. A combination of special districts allows projects to be financed, because the bonds are backed by a tax. The property owners have the assurance that the PID tax will go down as the tax increment revenue rises because the Boards of Directors of the PID and the TIRZ (which can and should be overlapping) represent, at least in part, the property owners themselves.

It should be noted that these districts and their associated organizations do not have to be the actual working partners. The TIRZ and the PID can contract with an appropriate nonprofit entity, such as an association of property owners within the district, to carry out the program of the district.

State law allows several mechanisms to finance economic development. The PID/TIRZ combination offers downtown Denton an opportunity to finance needed projects within a framework of empowering the property owners of the district.

CONCLUSION

Jumping on the Cycle of Success and Reward

This plan constitutes an ambitious vision and plan of action that will transform downtown Denton into a center of economic growth and community pride. While this may seem daunting at first, it is important to proceed with a sense of balance – enacting an ambitious vision while also proceeding thoughtfully and cautiously. There is a cycle of success and reward that should be followed – with small, relatively inexpensive steps taken at first, evaluating their success, and

then taking larger, bolder steps as confidence and knowledge escalates. Even small changes can build confidence in the downtown’s investment potential, but nothing will be as effective as the City’s demonstration of a long-term commitment to the downtown’s success. The best way to sustain this is to create and publicize a number of successful projects. This is best accomplished by a measured approach, working in tandem with private investors and monitoring those ideas that work best for Denton.

While this plan is ambitious and bold, the unique place Denton holds in north central Texas, its historic character, the artistic nature of the Denton community, and the robust growth of this area all bode well for the plan’s success. With the appearance of smaller “new” downtowns in the suburban areas around Denton, it is clear that the time has come for the unique benefits of a central downtown to be part of the area’s prosperity. Now is the time for downtown Denton to take its place as the preeminent urban center of North Central Texas.

This Plan constitutes an ambitious vision for the future as well as a plan of action.



