



# 4. Downtown Master Plan



GOAL	POLICIES FOR DECISION MAKERS
<p>Create a full-service, mixed-use “Destination Downtown” that functions as the center of the region.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene major city and downtown stakeholders.</li> <li>• Create a public-private partnership to lead the revitalization of downtown.</li> <li>• Create a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to support revitalization.</li> <li>• Make infrastructure investments that support revitalization.</li> <li>• Provide incentives for downtown development and redevelopment.</li> <li>• Designate or determine appropriate staff support or partner to advocate for downtown economic development.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the County to integrate the planning process for County facilities.</li> </ul>
<p>Create new “urban” residential districts and improve existing districts with infill.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise zoning and land use policies to support housing and mixed-use development.</li> <li>• Develop and implement design guidelines for public and private development.</li> <li>• Make infrastructure investments that support revitalization.</li> <li>• Make existing residential districts a priority for infill home development, working with private builders.</li> </ul>
<p>Support the location of new anchor destinations in downtown with City actions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide incentives to attract new anchors.</li> <li>• Promote downtown arts and culture activities through an existing or new organization.</li> <li>• Explore downtown locations for higher education and medical institutions.</li> </ul>
<p>Enhance the public realm including existing streets, parks, plazas, and open areas, and create new signature public spaces.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in a pedestrian-friendly streetscape.</li> <li>• Create a park in the western part of downtown.</li> <li>• Include water features in public spaces.</li> <li>• Expand programming for public spaces.</li> </ul>
<p>Create a pedestrian, bicycle and parking plan to enhance access and connections to downtown.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to create a rail-trail on the north-south line.</li> <li>• Identify pedestrian and bicycle needs, including bicycle racks.</li> <li>• Explore creation of a parking management district.</li> <li>• Explore a public-private partnership to build a parking garage.</li> <li>• Connect downtown to the medical district.</li> </ul>

## FINDINGS

- Existing downtown rental units do not meet demand and openings can be filled from waiting lists and without advertisement.
- Downtown today functions as a government center rather than as a true central business district or an active, regional downtown.
- Downtown businesses today primarily serve the government sector and daytime employees, with a small niche for antiques.
- Surface parking lots, underutilized and vacant buildings, and vacant lots characterize many parts of the downtown core.
- Residential areas in the northern part of the downtown planning area also include some vacant lots.
- New retail investment in downtown will depend on additional downtown population.

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- About one-third of the population of the Tyler region is open to urban-style housing options.
- A conservative analysis results in a potential market of 700 new housing units in downtown over the next ten years.

### CHALLENGES

- Creating the right mix of public and private initiatives to lead and implement downtown redevelopment
- Attracting new anchor uses and activities
- Creating an improved public realm to attract new private investment
- Assembling land for potential new uses



*Downtown Tyler in the 1930s*

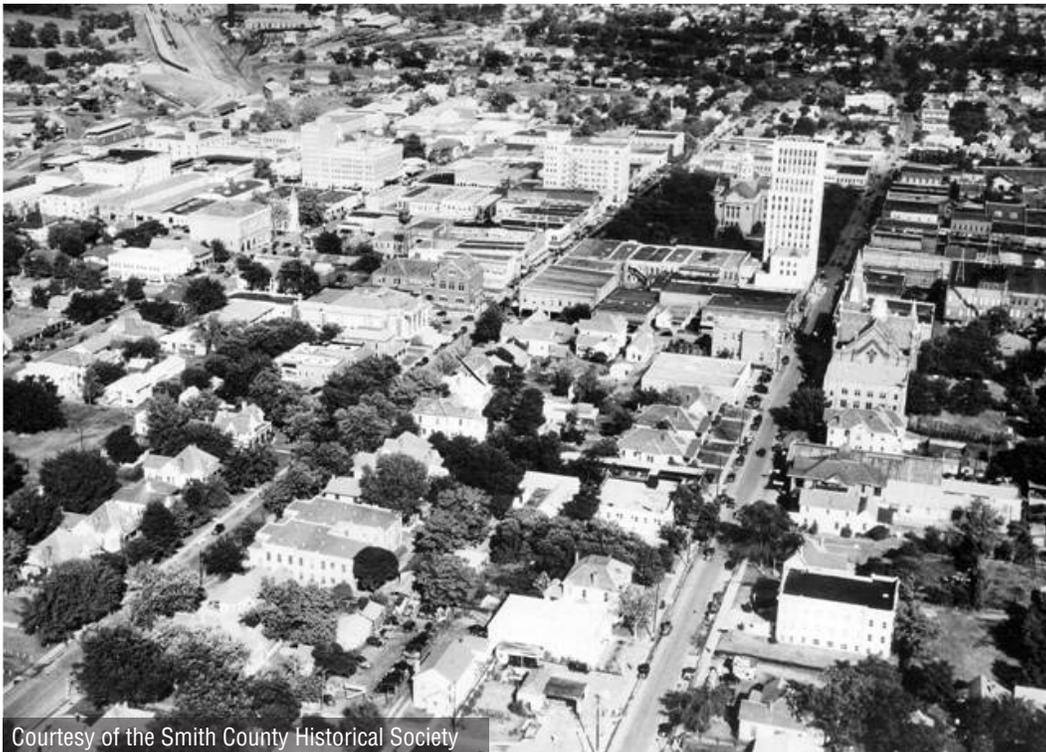
From the collection of Robert Reed, Tyler, TX

**T**he center of downtown Tyler in the 1930s, as shown in this postcard, was small but tightly built. The old courthouse sat in the center of a park that functioned as the central focus of downtown and the square was lined with buildings facing on that park. Buildings also filled most of the frontage of other streets. For another 30 years, downtown remained the government, banking, office and retail center of Tyler and several additional high-rise and mid-rise buildings were added to the downtown of the 1930s. But starting in the 1970s, like downtowns all across America, downtown Tyler lost its retail role to suburban malls and shopping centers and much of its office role to suburban office parks. Only the government function remained firmly anchored in downtown, along with several large historic churches. Over time, manufacturing uses increasingly left the downtown, many buildings struggled to retain active uses, and some buildings that became vacant or unprofitable were demolished and replaced with parking lots.

In the late 1980s, the Heart of Tyler Main Street Program was started to work on downtown revitalization. The historic neighborhoods just south of downtown were becoming more sought after, demonstrating that the city's growing new neighborhoods towards the south were not everybody's choice. Many Heart of Tyler efforts focused on attracting people back to downtown by annual events, such as the Festival on the Square, and on bringing retail back. Competition with the national retail businesses in South Tyler continued to prove very challenging. The success of the historic neighborhoods did not rub off on downtown, however. New investment was rare in the 1980s and 1990s.

Just as Tyler's downtown decline was part of a larger American story, its opportunities today are also part of a broader renaissance of cities and urban living. This renaissance began first in big cities, spread to the larger regional cities, and is now happening in smaller cities like Tyler. The changes in population composition discussed in earlier chapters—fewer family households, more households made up of single people and couples without children (both young and empty-nester)—as well as changing tastes and new housing types, have made urban locations more attractive as places to live. Instead of traditional department stores, downtown anchors are cultural centers, educational institutions, exciting open spaces with programmed activities, and restaurant districts. Downtown Tyler is ripe for a renaissance.

The Downtown Master Plan presented in this chapter is a conceptual plan based on an analysis of the physical and market characteristics of downtown. It identifies opportunities and provides direction for downtown revitalization, but is not a detailed plan for specific parcels.



*City Hall area in the 1930s, looking east to the downtown square.*

## A. Current Conditions

### COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS FOR DOWNTOWN

The Vision and Principles that emerged from the survey, the Community Visioning Retreat and Neighborhood Open Houses, as well as discussions of the Steering Committee, support focusing attention on downtown revitalization. The Vision included “a vibrant downtown” in Tyler’s future and one of the Principles focused specifically on downtown:

- “Reinvigorate the city center to be the downtown of East Texas:
  - > Develop a major downtown neighborhood of new and rehabilitated housing to provide the foundation for shopping, restaurants, culture, arts and entertainment in the evenings and on the weekend.
  - > Create a concentration of cultural and entertainment venues downtown.
  - > Program events throughout the year to attract visitors from around the region.”



*To many people, “downtown” means the square, but there are opportunities in a broader downtown area.*

As part of the downtown planning process, a community workshop was held on November 2, 2006, attracting over 80 people. The workshop took the form of an interactive presentation, with the consultant team presenting a series of ideas and the group commenting on those ideas. The team discussed national trends in downtown revitalization, a retail and residential market analysis of downtown Tyler, several scenarios for how downtown Tyler might grow, and discussion of a traditional Central Business District model or a “Destination Downtown” model for downtown.

Salient points that emerged from the discussions include:

- “No one ever told me that they loved downtown! They talk about other areas, like the Rose Garden, but never downtown!” Enhancement of the square is a good idea.
- Downtown churches are currently the big anchors that bring people downtown.
- Tyler lacks a solid nucleus; downtown should be this nucleus.
- There are good things going on in Tyler, but so many activities are isolated from the rest of the city. Things are happening in pockets, such as at Tyler Junior College and UT-Tyler.
- Some of these recommendations have been heard before in Tyler. The big issue is how to implement them.
- The brick streets are one thing that ties Tyler together.
- Downtown Tyler must have both private and public investment. It is unrealistic to assume that private investment will take all of the risk. Public investment can serve as a catalyst.

- Downtown residents must come before you get more retail. The proportion of single-person households is growing nationally, which helps downtown revitalization all over the country. This has also prompted the creation of new residential products.

Not everyone wants to live in a single-family home these days.

- The track record with our current downtown housing proves that there is a market here for downtown housing. The units are always full, and there is a waiting list for them. A downtown condominium renovation has been very successful, with interest particularly from people from the Dallas-Fort Worth area.
- Downtown Tyler must have an anchor project that will show the City's commitment to downtown.
- There are plenty of private individuals who are willing to invest in downtown Tyler right now. The City and Smith County must work together to make downtown revitalization happen.
- If the 15-story residential tower can be successful at the Cascades, it would work in downtown.
- Downtown Tyler has unique cultural demographics. For example, the area over toward Beckham Avenue has a lot of entrepreneurial Hispanics. Downtown right now is just a big void that we need to fill. Tyler has money to spend, but right now there are no opportunities for spending it.
- Minority contractors need to have opportunities to participate in revitalization.
- Success could bring gentrification problems, pushing out lower-income people. Plans should keep that in mind.
- This is not just about a building plan for downtown, but working with the community to build a constituency to make the plan happen.

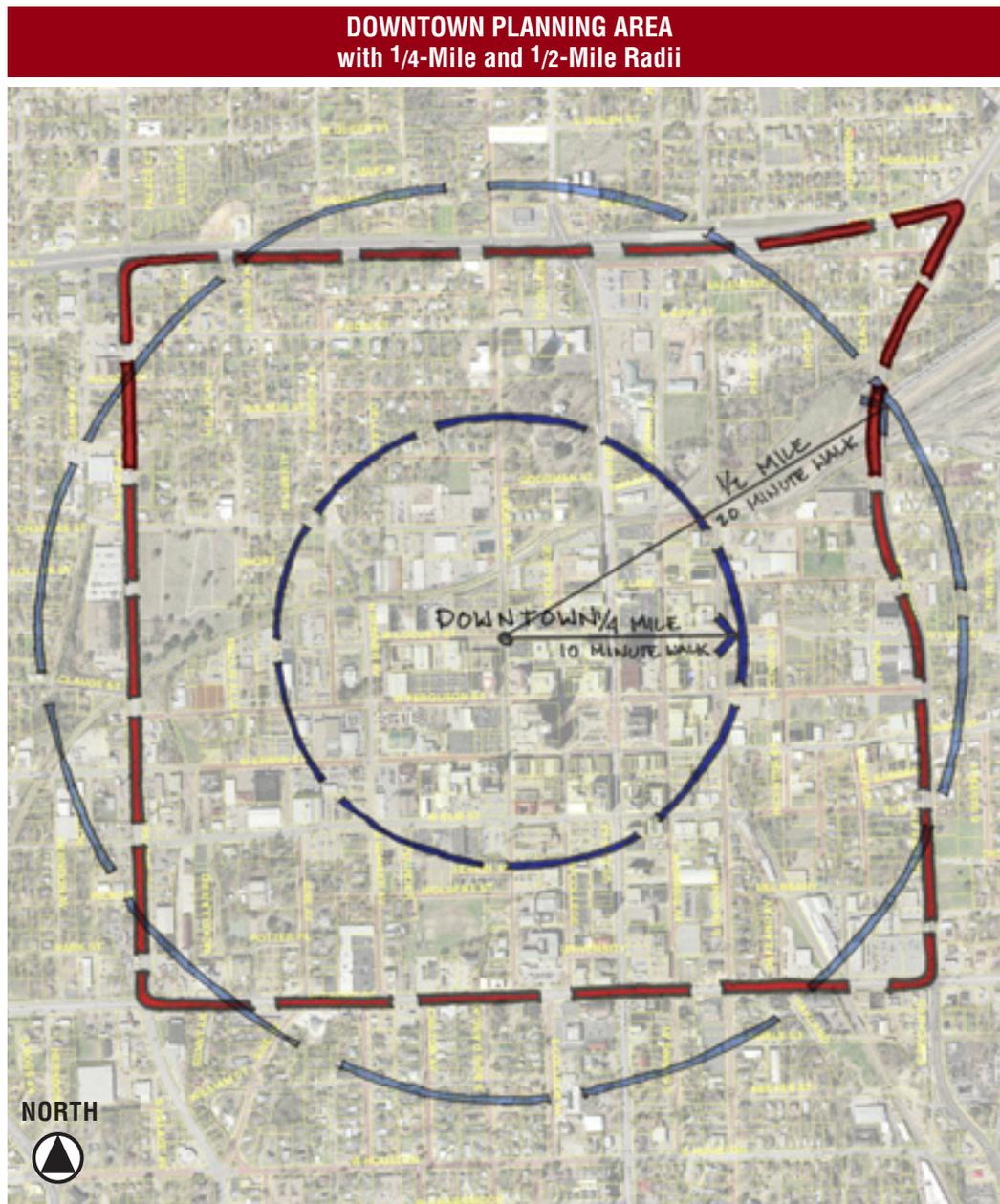


*Workshop participants view conceptual alternatives.*

## **DOWNTOWN PLANNING AREA**

The downtown planning area is a rectangle bounded by Front Street to the south, Palace Avenue to the west, Gentry Parkway to the north, and Beckham Avenue to the east. The area contains about 400 acres, or less than one square mile.

The downtown planning district is walkable. It is approximately ½ mile from the edge of downtown to the courthouse, which is about a twenty minute walk. If the environment is attractive and engaging, people are typically willing to walk ½ mile to get to their destination. Unfortunately, today the edges of many downtown streets are unattractive and uncomfortable for pedestrians, so the walk is experienced as being much longer and unappealing.



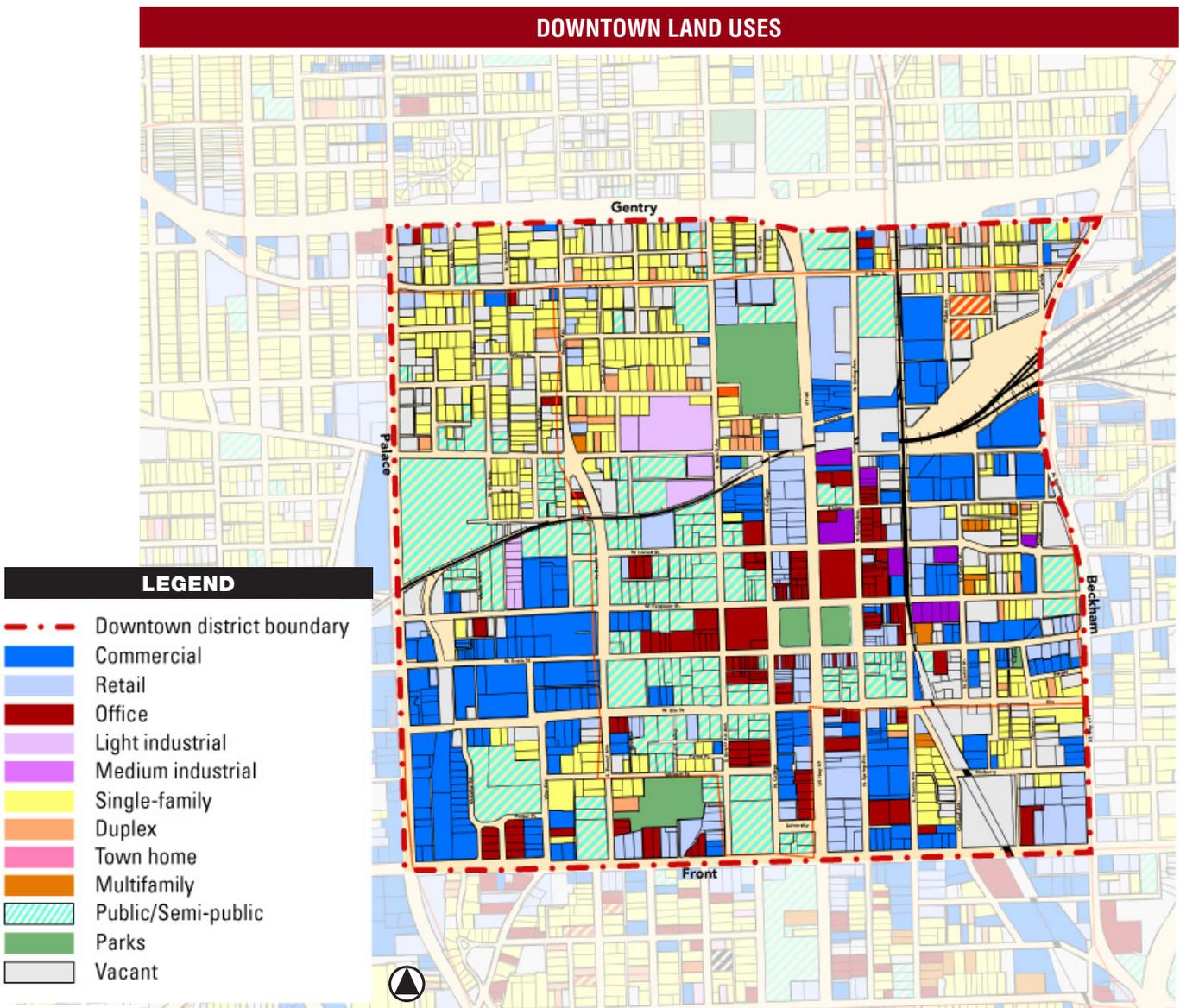
Source: City of Tyler GIS data

## ZONING

The Central Business District zoning district (C-3) covers the central downtown area. Manufacturing and light industrial zoning surrounds the CBD, and different types of residential zoning occupy the fringes of the downtown planning area.

## LAND USE

The land uses in the downtown planning area do not, in many instances, reflect the zoning. This is particularly the case in areas zoned for manufacturing. Predominantly residential uses occupy the northwest corner of the planning area, with a smaller residential sector to the northeast and scattered residences in the first few blocks west of Beckham Avenue. The land use map below is based on 1999 data but reflects today's uses well. Many lots are in the "Public/Semi-public" category, which not only includes government buildings but also nonprofit private organizations such as churches and charities. Office use clusters around the downtown core. According to Burns and Noble, there were 17 office buildings with 824,000 square feet in 2006. There are many underutilized properties, including vacant or little-used buildings and vacant lots (residential and nonresidential).



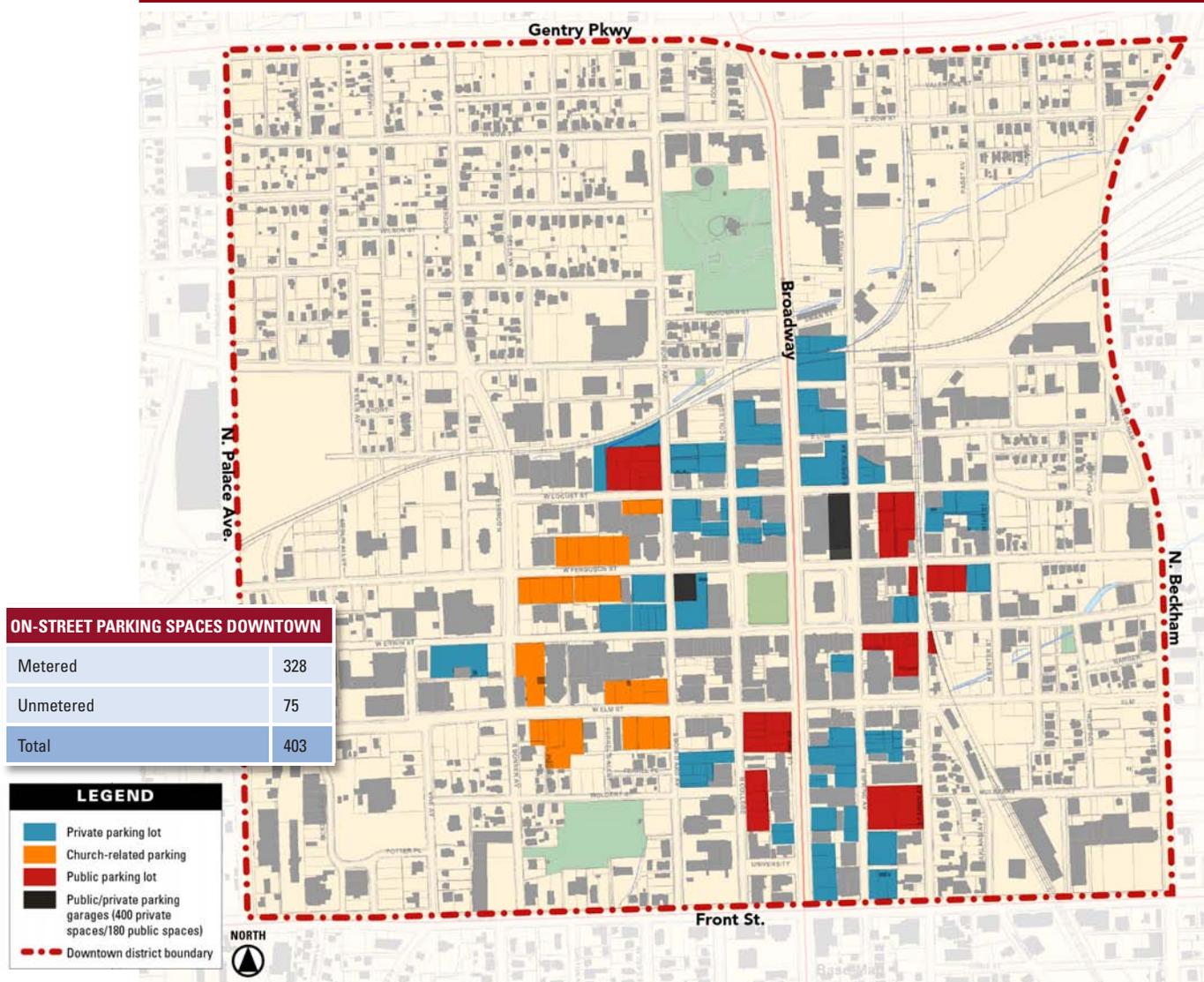
Source: City of Tyler GIS data



## PARKING

There are many surface parking lots and two parking garages downtown. Parking is typically dedicated to individual uses, which means that some lots are nearly empty on some days and during particular parts of the day. For example, the large historic churches downtown need lots of parking for Sunday services and evening events, but during week-day hours, these parking lots are lightly used. There are at least 5,000 parking spaces in the core downtown area, including approximately 600 in the two parking garages. Nearly 600 of the total spaces are public spaces, that is, parking available on the street (metered and unmetered) and in a garage, for people going anywhere in downtown, and the remainder are private, reserved for employees, clients, or customers of specific business or organizations.

### EXISTING OFF-STREET PARKING IN THE DOWNTOWN CORE



Source: City of Tyler GIS data



## UNDERUTILIZED AND VACANT LAND

In addition to the many surface parking lots in the downtown core, there are a number of vacant and underutilized buildings, particularly west of North Bonner Avenue and also between Beckham Avenue and the north-south railroad line. Large vacant sites and smaller infill opportunities exist outside of the core of downtown. In 2006, there were approximately 74 acres of vacant land in the downtown planning area.



*The view from the People's Bank building shows the many parking lots and one-story buildings southwest of the square.*

## NATURAL, HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Downtown is the location of important natural features, historic and cultural resources. Butler Plaza in downtown Tyler is said to be built over a natural spring. The creeks that once flowed through downtown have been channelized for drainage and only one is above ground. Today, these creeks do not provide a sense of access to water but the remaining water could become more of an amenity. Downtown's importance as the city's original site and its center of activity for more than a century is still evident in the existence of many properties that are designated Tyler Historic Landmarks. Civic buildings and historic churches are important elements of the downtown landscape.

However, it is also true that some of the historic fabric of the city center has been lost, particularly since the 1950s, through demolition and through replacement of older buildings with sometimes undistinguished newer architecture. In addition, there are vacant buildings of historic interest which need new uses. Among the most distinctive vacant buildings are the Crescent Laundry on East Ferguson Street and the Ice House on North Spring Avenue. Downtown Tyler's remaining original brick streets also convey a sense of place and identity. The City maintains the brick streets that are exposed, but there are some street sections and intersections where bricks have been paved over with asphalt, breaking continuity.

Cultural resources in downtown include a cluster of



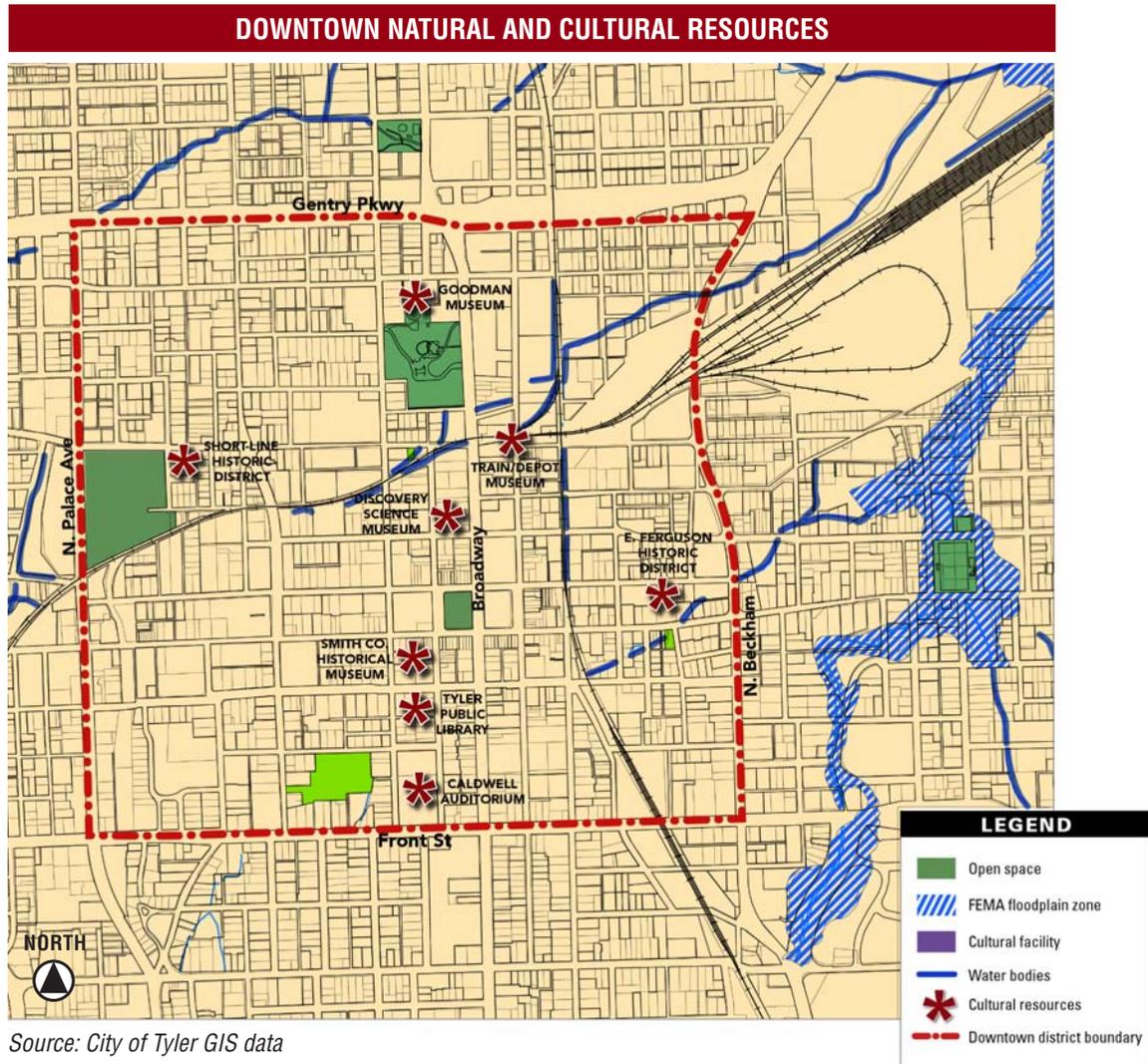
*The Crescent Laundry (above) and the Ice House (below) are distinctive buildings lying vacant.*



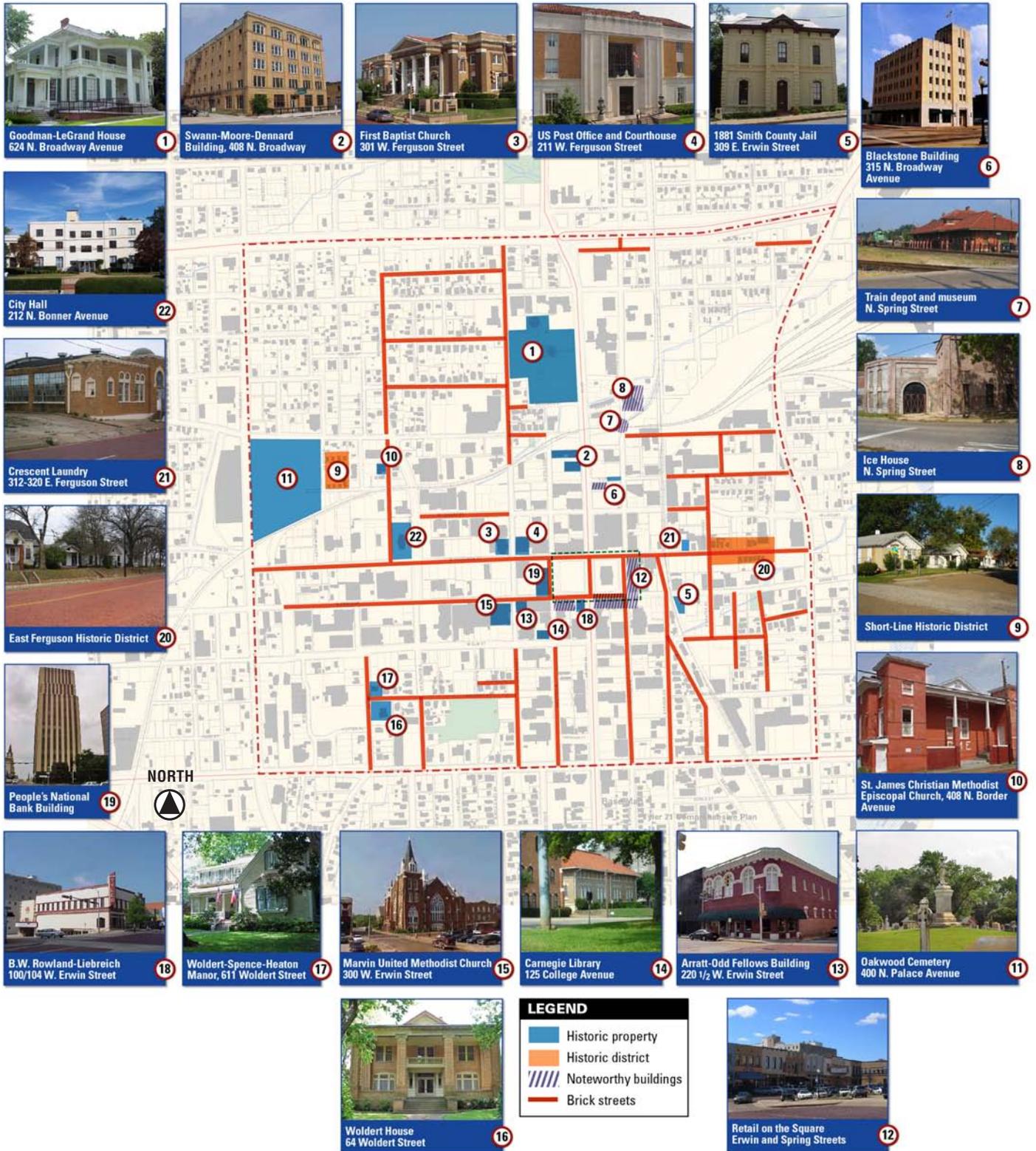
*Caldwell Park needs improvements to live up to its potential.*

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small museums, the Tyler Public Library, Caldwell Auditorium, the Smith County Historical Museum located in a former Carnegie library, and the Goodman Museum within a spacious garden, which occupies an important site at the entry to the downtown from the north.

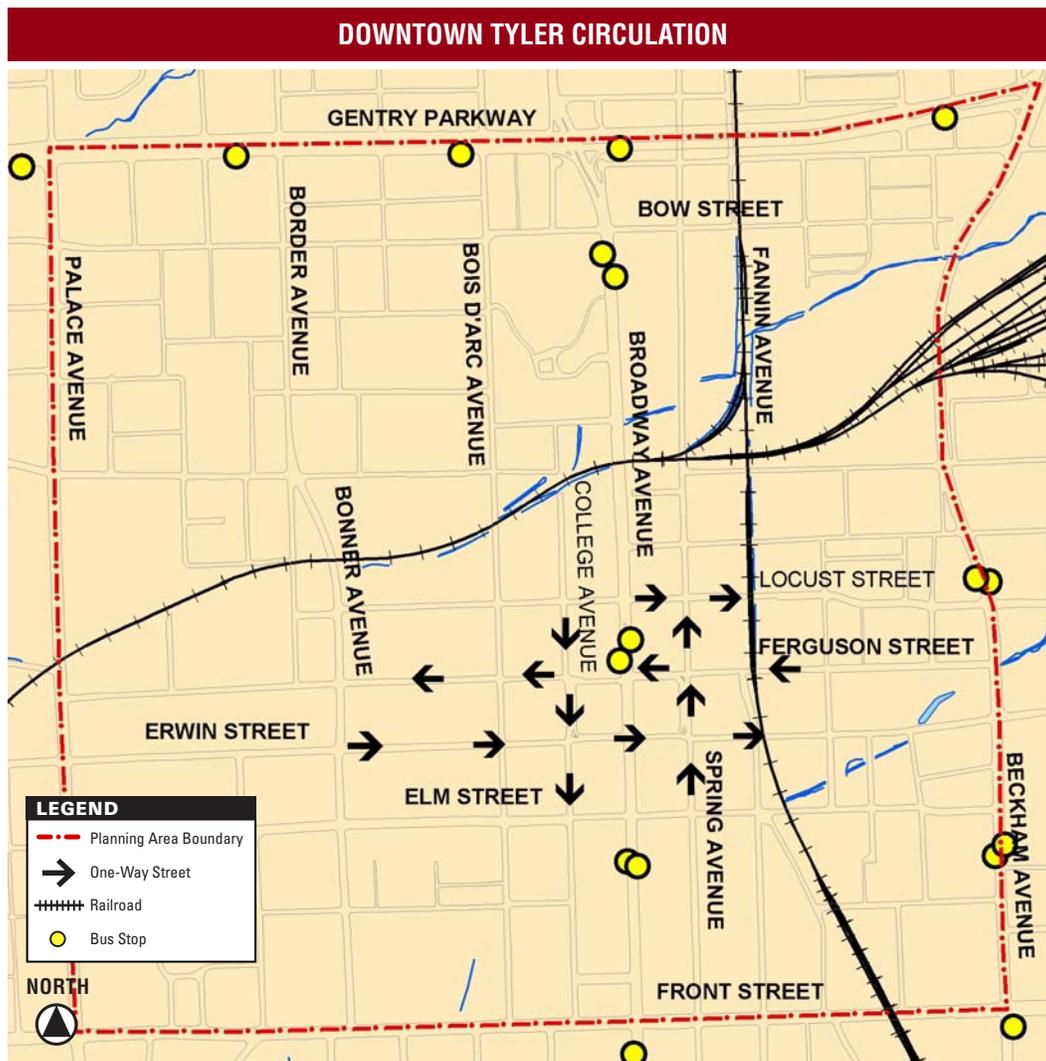


**HISTORIC PROPERTIES IN DOWNTOWN TYLER**



## CIRCULATION AND TRANSPORTATION

The downtown planning area is bounded by four major urban arterials and bisected by a fifth. Three of them, Front Street, Beckham Avenue and Palace Avenue, have four lanes and a turning lane in most segments that bound downtown and Gentry Parkway to the north has six lanes plus turning lanes but less traffic. Front, Beckham and Palace carry substantial traffic volumes (approximately 20,000 vehicles per day in some locations in 2005) and function as barriers between the walkable grid of downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. Gentry Parkway carries less traffic, but the road is much wider. Gentry Parkway traffic is carried on a overpass just east of Broadway Avenue, with Spring Avenue and Fannin Avenue connecting to North Tyler under the road. Broadway Avenue bisects downtown and its four to five lanes also carry almost 20,000 vehicles per day. It dips below a railroad bridge at the gateway to the downtown core, between Goodman Street and Line Street.



Source: City of Tyler GIS data

Inside the planning area, a grid of two-lane streets, including many brick segments, allows for easy circulation by vehicles. There is one-way circulation around the square—the county courthouse and Butler Plaza—and Ferguson and Erwin streets operate as a one-way pair going in and out of the square. The grid layout is suitable as an excellent pedestrian network, but walking conditions and amenities for pedestrians are not good. Crosswalks are lacking at most intersections.

Two rail lines cross downtown. The east-west Union Pacific Line is active, with freight trains traveling nonstop through the downtown. The City has completed a “Quiet Zone” study in preparation for an effort to eliminate the noise from train whistles. The second rail line is a north-south rail spur that is no longer in use and has future potential as a multiuse trail.

Public transit lines travel on Gentry Parkway, Broadway Avenue and Beckham Avenue, with bus stops every two to three blocks.

## URBAN DESIGN

The urban design character of the downtown planning area is eclectic and reflects the economic transitions that the area has experienced. Positive aspects include the overall layout and street grid within the planning area, efforts to create a sense of place around the square, and the persistence of some historic buildings. However, the few newer buildings are not always compatible with the remaining historic fabric and disinvestment has resulted in many underutilized lots and buildings. This discussion will concentrate on the urban design character of the downtown core.

### Buildings

- Two-story buildings around the south and east sides of the square and part of the north side form a traditional Texas courthouse square with the buildings at the sidewalk edge. Many have awnings to shade the pedestrian way. This is one of the few areas in the core downtown where there is a somewhat cohesive architectural character.
- On the north side of the square several five- to six-story buildings with wide frontage—including a TV station with a huge, eye-catching satellite dish on the roof—are mixed with the smaller-footprint buildings typical of the south and east sides of the square.



*Awnings on buildings around the square*



*Office towers on each end of the west block of the square leave an awkward empty space between them.*

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- Two towers of 18 to 20 stories dominate the west side of the square, with a gap between them that from some vantage points shows a view of the spire of Marvin Methodist Church. Several mid-rise office buildings can be found in downtown, especially on Broadway Avenue between Front Street and the rail overpass.
- Marvin Methodist Church and the First Baptist Church have imposing historic buildings that meet the street edge, but newer construction for church activities is located behind parking lots. The newer buildings are undistinguished in materials and character.
- West of the square between Elm Street and the railroad tracks, except for the federal courthouse, the historic church buildings and City Hall, most older buildings are one-story, low-value, and often underutilized. Newer structures are low-value metal buildings. There are many street edges dominated by parking lots.
- East of the square, blocks can vary radically in character: there are blocks with buildings of historic interest; blocks lined by parking lots; both occupied and vacant industrial buildings; scattered residential blocks, including the East Ferguson Historic District; and empty lots.

### Public Open Space

- Butler Plaza is the only significant public open space in the core of downtown. It is the remnant of a much bigger central square that surrounded the 1909 county courthouse. Butler Plaza fails to have as much impact as it might because the buildings around it do not effectively enclose it as an “outdoor room.” Although it has some low trees, shrubs and a fountain, it also has many hard surfaces and does not yet communicate a sense of green oasis.



*Butler Plaza is the only significant green public space in the downtown core.*

### Lighting

- The acorn lighting installed around the square is pedestrian-friendly. Elsewhere in downtown, highway-scale “cobra” lighting is used.

### Landscaping

- City Hall has attractive landscaping surrounding it, including beautiful mature trees, but it fronts on the Tyler Development Center parking lot and the rear façade faces police department metal buildings, driveways, metal fences and parking lots. The attractiveness of the building and its immediate site is lost in an undistinguished setting.



*Acorn lights around the square are the right height for pedestrians but rather widely spaced for optimum light distribution.*

- Other historic buildings have some lawn and shrubs but few trees immediately around the building and are also surrounded by parking lots, metal buildings, and similar features.
- The courthouse also has limited landscaping and the back of the courthouse facing on Spring Avenue is dominated by parking and hard surfaces.
- In the downtown core, there are few mature street trees except on the block of Bonner Avenue facing the Tyler Development Center and in the North Broadway Avenue median. A few street trees have been planted around the square and on other streets downtown, but many appear to be species that do not provide a good shade canopy for pedestrians.
- A few parking lots have minimal green grass strips around them and a very few have trees or shrubs planted at the perimeter. Not one parking lot has trees or shade within the parking lot.



*One of many parking lots lacking separation from the sidewalk or street*



*Typical sidewalk width near the square*

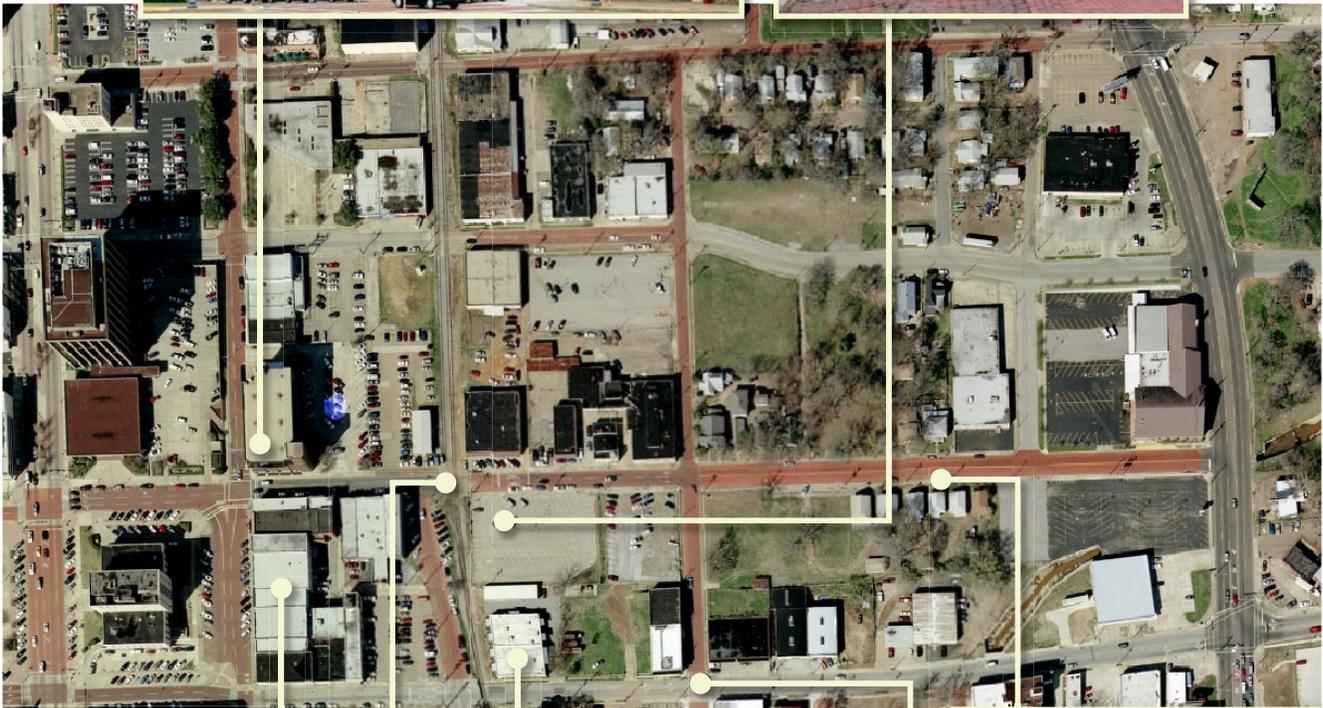
## Streets

- Downtown has many block segments that retain historic brick pavers. These pavers are no longer manufactured and suitable replacements have been hard to find. The colored concrete pavers used around the square have not been universally accepted as a substitute.
- Sidewalks are narrow and some are in poor condition.
- Many street frontages, and in some cases, almost entire blocks are dominated by surface parking lots. Most of these lots have little or no boundary (fence, shrubbery, etc.) between the sidewalk and the parking area.

**DOWNTOWN CHARACTER WEST OF THE SQUARE**

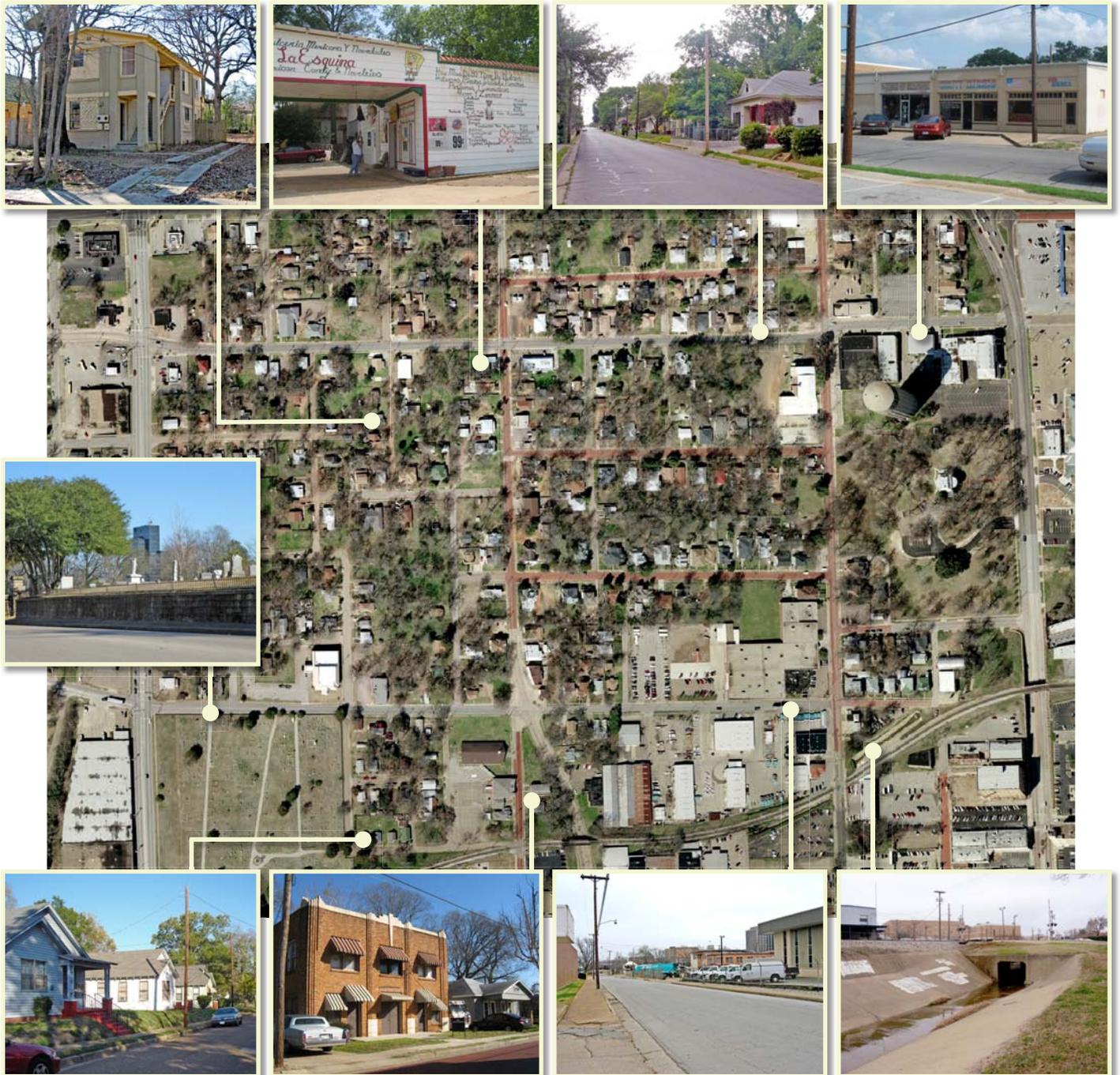


**DOWNTOWN CHARACTER EAST OF THE SQUARE**



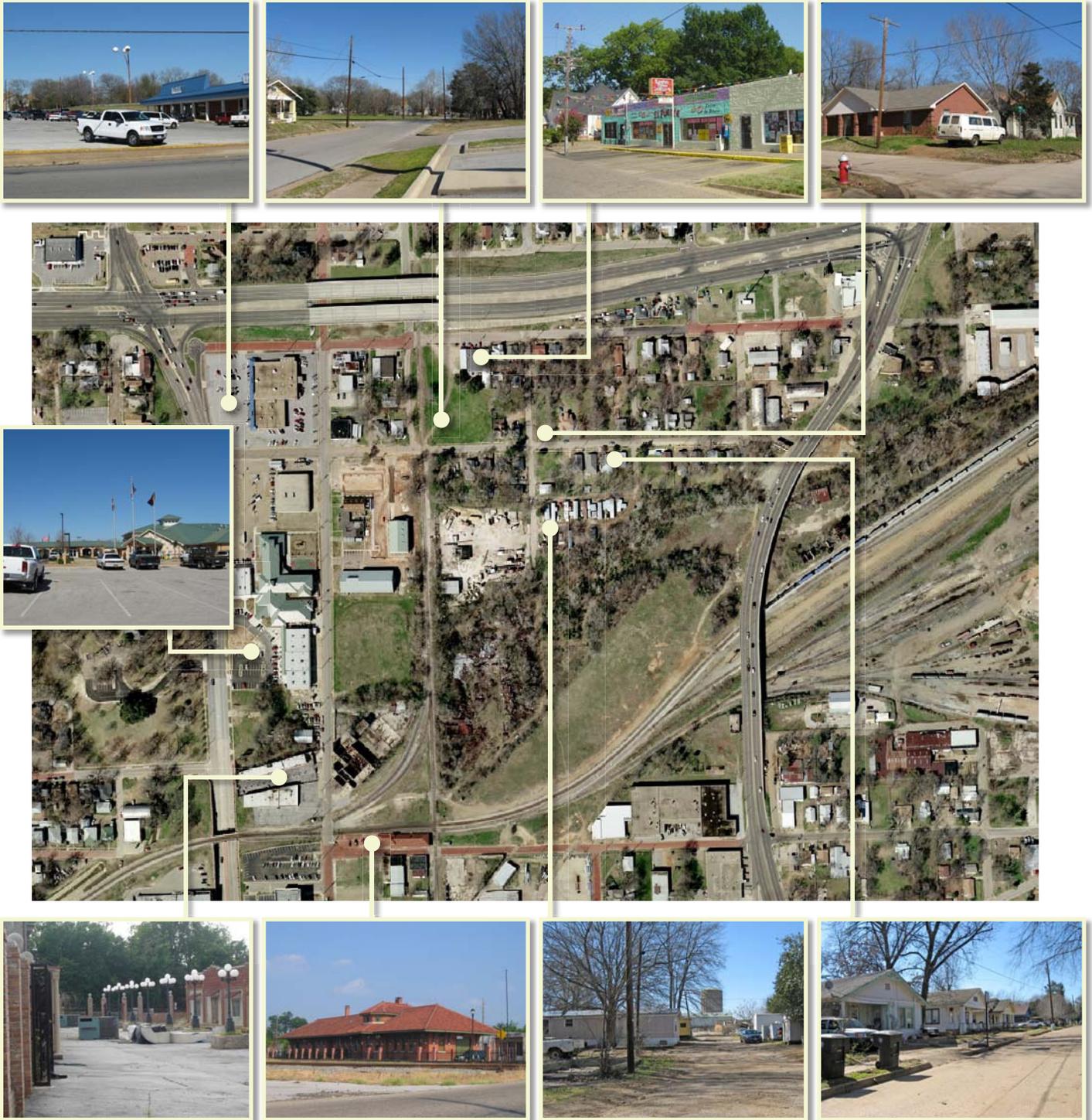
### NORTHWEST QUADRANT OF THE DOWNTOWN PLANNING AREA

The northwest quadrant links the downtown planning area to the North End. It is a primarily residential neighborhood of single-family houses, many trees and some vacant lots. Hispanic immigrants in recent years have been establishing neighborhood stores and improving homes. The Goodman Museum and City facilities are located at the southeastern corner of this quadrant and Oakwood Cemetery occupies the southwestern corner.



### NORTHEAST QUADRANT OF THE DOWNTOWN PLANNING AREA

The northeastern section—between the train tracks, Gentry Parkway, and Broadway Avenue—is a somewhat isolated area with a mixture of residential and other uses, as well as vacant lots. This area has also seen Hispanic investment.



## **CURRENT IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE DOWNTOWN PLANNING AREA**

In addition to the previously mentioned investments by Hispanic newcomers to the residential areas in downtown, several new projects are underway in the core of downtown Tyler. A mixed-income rental project funded with Low-Income Housing Tax Credits has been approved for the Moore Grocery/Tyler Candle Building. This will be an adaptive re-use of a historic building for affordable housing. The grounds of the Goodman Museum are being redesigned to improve their suitability for events in order to attract more activity. The County government is studying options for expansion of its facilities. The former Carleton Hotel, the current County office building, is in bad condition and the jail needs to expand. After considerable discussion about whether to move the jail and other offices out of downtown, the County appears to have decided to pursue downtown options. Although locating the jail will require care, so that it contributes to overall revitalization rather than detracting from it, it is important to downtown that the County government remain located there.

## **SUMMARY: DOWNTOWN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

Downtown's strengths are a function of its continuing importance as a government center and a remaining connection to the idea of downtown as the historic core of Tyler's identity.

- The square provides a sense of place.
- The county and city governments provide a sense of identity.
- Downtown office employment provides a daytime market.
- There are a small number of restaurants.
- Modest attractions include museums and historic buildings.
- Large and architecturally-significant churches are found near the square.
- Several annual events, such as the Festival on the Square, the Jazz Festival, and the Blues Festival, bring a multicultural population into downtown, making it the meeting place for all Tylerites.
- Vacant land is available to support growth.

Downtown also suffers from a number of weaknesses that will need to be addressed:

- The overall image is poor. Many Tylerites never go downtown either because they believe nothing happens there, or because they are afraid that bad things happen there (*i.e.*, crime).
- In the evening, there is little activity except for several restaurants.
- The downtown core is isolated from surrounding neighborhoods by surface parking lots, underutilized and vacant land.
- There are few housing units near the downtown core.
- Downtown has no significant anchor attractions.
- Although land is available, land assembly and site issues may be barriers to ready development.
- There is no overall plan in place—yet.

## KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL DOWNTOWNS

- **Successful downtowns are great places to live, work, and play.** They attract creative people with a *mix of uses*, a combination of housing, daytime employment and entertainment for evenings and weekends. These downtowns are *attractive environments*. It feels good to be there because it is interesting and safe, with open space, places to gather and sit in comfort, a sense of history in buildings or monuments and other amenities, and attractive streets.
- **Successful downtowns are generally mixed-use in character.** Successful downtowns treat mixed-use development as a critical component to the urban environment. Tyler’s downtown core has some mixed-use buildings, primarily around the square, but there is not a strong, critical mass of mixed-use activity.
- **Successful downtowns tend to have multiple activity generators within walking distance of one another.** Activity generators like museums, convention centers, universities, government offices, and other cultural destinations bring residents and visitors to a downtown. By giving value to the “place,” these “anchors” support retail, office, hotel, and residential development. Tyler’s downtown already has some anchor uses—primarily city and county government, the courts, and civic uses like the library and churches.
- **Successful downtowns are walkable and have streets that act as parks for pedestrians.** In successful downtowns people walk the street as a recreational pursuit. There is enough activity to create a vibrant downtown environment. Tyler’s streets lack pedestrian-friendly amenities and enough interesting activity for pedestrians.
- **Entertainment is a driving market segment.** Entertainment extends the life of downtown beyond 5:00 p.m. Restaurants, theaters, and performing arts centers make up the entertainment niche. In Tyler, a handful of restaurants keep downtown open after government workers have gone home for the day. There are two unoccupied theater spaces on the square.
- **They have strong downtown residential and adjacent neighborhoods.** Successful downtowns have a strong resident constituency. Downtown residents are not only advocates for downtown, but are an important market supporting the mix of land uses downtown. A small number of apartments on the square in Tyler have been very successful in attracting tenants. In the entire downtown planning area there is a total of about 800 residents, including the blocks that extend to Houston Street.



*Downtown colleges or satellite campuses have helped bring life to many downtowns. The Savannah College of Art and Design transformed downtown Savannah.*



*Hotels with meeting rooms are good downtown anchors.*



*The new Denver Museum of Art has developed a new downtown neighborhood with housing next door.*

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- **Successful downtowns are safe and secure.** Customers and businesses want a sense of safety and security when they are working, shopping, and living downtown. Often, downtowns suffer more from a perception of being unsafe rather than a reality of crime. Community policing, taking care of “broken window” issues, lighting, and having an active environment are all ways successful downtowns enhance safety and security. Tyler’s downtown is very safe, but it suffers from perception issues.
- **There is broad public/private investment in the future of downtown.** Great downtowns are actively planning for the future. In all cases, the public sector supports downtown investment and joint public/private development is pervasive in successful downtowns. Tyler has supported organizations like Heart of Tyler Main Street but is new to public-private development partnerships.
- **Successful downtowns are beloved by the citizenry.** Successful downtowns tend to have regional significance. Successful downtowns are a source of regional pride and reflect the culture of the community. Tyler’s downtown does not capture the attention of the majority of citizens.



*Townhouses, Addison Circle (TX)*



*New apartments in San Antonio attract young residents.*



*Street festivals become a meeting place for the whole community.*



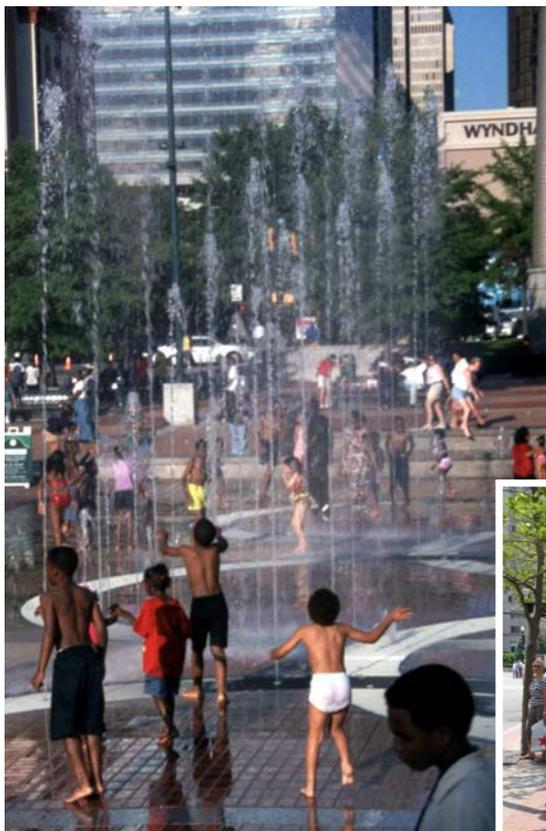
*Public investment in streetscape amenities encourages pedestrian activity.*



*Restaurants with sidewalk dining promote “after 5:00” use of downtown areas.*

## GREAT PLACES

Successful downtowns have great places where people like to be. These places come about through a combination of good design for the public realm and programming of activities of activities.



*Great places often have water—natural or manmade—as in this interactive fountain in Atlanta, GA.*



*Great public places need programs and performances.*



*Farmers' markets bring people downtown.*



*Sidewalk cafés bring life to the street.*



*Playful public art—and more water—creates excitement in Chicago's Millennium Park.*

## DESIGN MAKES A DIFFERENCE



*Enclosure and paint can make auto-oriented businesses good neighbors.*



*A parking structure located behind storefronts.*



*Wayfinding signs orient visitors.*



*Pedestrian-scale storefronts line taller buildings and a parking garage. Street trees, plantings, awnings, curb bump-outs, on-street parking, simple signs for garage parking, and big and transparent windows all contribute to a pleasant pedestrian environment.*

## CASE STUDIES

Downtowns in cities and regions similar in size to Tyler are in a renaissance, with new housing, anchors and activities.

### Columbia, South Carolina

The City of Columbia, South Carolina, has a population of approximately 117,000 people within an MSA of 575,000, similar to Tyler. In May 2006, there were 4,000 new housing units either completed or in the planning stages for downtown—townhouses, condos, apartments, live-work units, and single family houses. Downtown is an employment center; it has restaurants, an art-film theater, an art museum, a gym, and food market; and the University of South Carolina is planning a research district downtown.

### Center in the Square, Roanoke, Virginia

Roanoke is a city of about 100,000 people in a metropolitan area of about 300,000. In 1977, a group of residents joined to work for downtown revitalization based on the arts. In 1983, a downtown cultural center called Center in the Square opened with 40,000 visitors in the first weekend. The Western Virginia Foundation for the Arts and Sciences, which owns Center in the Square, acquired nearby buildings in 1988, 1997, 2000, and 2003 and now hosts seven cultural organizations, including museums and performing arts groups. The Center's success has attracted over \$500 million in construction and renovation in the immediate area and its annual economic impact is estimated at \$25 million.



*Downtown theatre in Fort Worth, TX*



*Downtown trolley in Charlottesville, VA*



*Public plaza, Charleston, SC*



*Historic Battle House Hotel in Mobile, AL, rehabilitated in 2006*

## REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE, SC

**Downtown Greenville**

- CBD of 300 acres; larger downtown area of 1.75 square miles
- Linear organization along Main Street
- Downtown core includes a five-block area
- Reedy River runs southwest of downtown core

*Poinsett Hotel and courthouse plaza**Reedy River***The Challenge**

Greenville, with a city population of around 60,000, serves as the center of a region that includes approximately 570,000 residents. A former textile hub, Greenville saw rapid suburbanization in the decades following World War II, and construction of new outlying shopping centers drained vitality from downtown. By the 1970s, downtown's position as a regional retail center had eroded and residents had few reasons to visit the downtown area.

**The Approach**

Although Greenville was seeing growth in other sections of the city, leaders refused to accept the downtown's decline. The city elected a visionary mayor in the 1970s who was a strong advocate of downtown revitalization, and his administration set about returning the downtown to prominence. They realized that downtown appeared tired and that the business district needed public investment to attract private interest. Their first major action was to hire a landscape architect to redesign the downtown streetscape. Completed in 1979, the streetscape plan recommended re-

*Hyatt Regency Hotel and public plaza, built through a public-private partnership*

REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE, SC



*Peace Center for the Performing Arts*

ter, a parking garage, and a public plaza and leased the air rights for a new Hyatt Regency hotel. Public investment comprised about one-third of the project's total cost. The City also created a southern anchor by building the Peace Center for the Performing Arts in a former industrial area along the Reedy River. A local donor provided \$10 million to initiate the project, and the City established a tax increment financing (TIF) district. County and state funds also were used, and additional funds were received from the private sector (approximately 70% of the project cost).

The new anchors began to draw residents and visitors downtown, and restaurants, clubs, and special events followed. The City formed a partnership with a developer to rehabilitate the historic Poinsett Hotel, located near the courthouse in the center of Main Street, and to create additional uses, including a new 220,000 square foot office building, residential penthouses, and condominiums. The City also used tax increment financing to construct a new parking garage along a side street and worked throughout the 1990s with economic development organizations, real estate marketers, and developers to recruit new retail tenants. Restaurants and entertainment provided early successes, but retail was slow to grow. An aggressive marketing campaign focused on attracting an anchor to a former department store building with the hope that specialty retail would follow. In 2003, the Mast General Store, a major clothing/outfitter in western North Carolina and South Carolina, opened an 18,000 square foot store and smaller apparel and toy stores followed.

ducing the width of Main Street from four lanes to two, widening sidewalks, planting trees and shrubs along the denuded streets, changing parallel parking to diagonal parking, and adding street furniture and outdoor dining.

Leaders also understood that improving downtown's appearance would not be enough to catalyze revitalization. In the early 1980s, they developed the Downtown Master Plan to guide their efforts over the next twenty-five years. A major recommendation of the plan was to create downtown anchors through public-private partnerships. The City used its urban renewal powers and federal Urban Development Action Grant funds to purchase land for a hotel/convention center anchor on the northern end of Main Street. The City built the convention center



*Public gardens in Reedy River Park*



*Riverplace, a new public-private project, includes condominiums, offices, retail, an underground parking garage, and a public river walkway.*

REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE, SC

Downtown Streetscape:



A canopy of mature street trees planted 25 years ago provides shade for pedestrians and enhances the public realm.



Diagonal parking and plantings between the sidewalk and street increase safety and security for pedestrians.



Clear, detailed signage improves wayfinding for drivers and pedestrians.



Wide sidewalks allow space for outdoor dining.



Grouped signs and newspaper boxes reduce visual and physical clutter.



A mid-block "hole" becomes a public plaza.

REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE, SC

Downtown Housing:



Downtown Mixed-Use Projects:



## REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE, SC

As foot traffic grew along Main Street in the late 1990s, city leaders decided to expand their vision beyond the original five-block area. Realizing that the Reedy River was a major asset, they sought to direct some new development to the West End, a neglected river area southwest of the downtown core once known as Greenville's "other downtown." Private donations provided land for the West End Market, a mixed-use development that includes office, retail, restaurants, artist space, and a farmers' market. Historic buildings were rehabilitated for the majority of the space. The City took the lead role as developer, using tax increment financing, grants, a HUD Section 108 loan, general fund dollars, and private donations to fund the project. In 2005, the City sold the West End Market at a profit, which provided it with new funds to invest in other downtown projects. This included a new park along the Reedy River which features a waterfall, suspension bridge, public gardens, and a pedestrian river trail and a public-private partnership for Riverplace, a new mixed-use development that includes residential units, a Hampton Inn, offices, retail, restaurants, and a parking garage.

### Downtown Greenville Today

Today downtown Greenville is nationally recognized as a model for successful downtown revitalization. Thirty years after the decision to invest in downtown, the City has seen its plans come to fruition. Main Street has become a thriving corridor with a lush tree canopy, walkable streets, and inviting public spaces. Downtown now includes over 1,200 residential units, 130 retail shops, 79 restaurants, and 730 hotel rooms. Office space totals over 3 million square feet, and comprises one-third of the office space in the region. Sales in 2005 included \$110 million in retail sales and over \$50 million in restaurant sales. Additional completed projects on the downtown edges include new museums; the Bi-Lo Center, an entertainment and sports venue; and the West End Baseball Stadium, a mixed-use project that contains a sports facility, condominiums, office, and retail space. In 2003, Greenville won the Great American Main Street Award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation in recognition of its superior achievement in downtown revitalization.



*A downtown trolley runs between major attractions.*

### LESSONS LEARNED

According to Nancy Whitworth, Greenville's economic development director for over twenty-five years, the City learned several key lessons about revitalization<sup>1</sup>:

- Think and act entrepreneurially and be willing to take risks
- Public investment adds value to private development
- Seek creative financing options
- Set design standards for the public realm
- Ensure that all projects are integrated with the downtown environment
- Recognize that little details matter
- Plan for people

<sup>1</sup> Whitworth, Nancy. "A City's Tools for Downtown Development: Much More Than Money." *Economic Development America* (Fall 2006): 12-15.

<b>DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION CASE STUDY COMPARISONS</b>			
	<b>GREENVILLE, SC</b>	<b>LITTLE ROCK, AR</b>	<b>OKLAHOMA CITY, OK</b>
City population	59,300	184,400	532,300
MSA population	472,200	636,900	1,150,800
Regional role	County seat; regional center (Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson)	State capital; county seat	State capital; county seat
<b>DOWNTOWN POPULATION</b>			
Total	Not available	4,227 (2003)	7,805 (2005)
Households	Not available	2,240 (2003)	2,841 (2005)
<b>DOWNTOWN RESIDENTIAL UNITS</b>			
Total	1200 units (372 low-income elderly/disabled)	Not available	867 units
Built within past 10 years	35%	Not available	374
Size	Not available	Not available	Range from 515 sf to 1500 sf
Type of units	Apartments, condos	Apartments, condos, lofts, townhomes	Apartments, condos, townhomes
Rents/Sales prices	Average sales price: \$256,251; 2006 rents: \$400-\$2,350	Not available	Rents: \$590-\$2,000
Costs per square foot	Average: \$209/sq. ft.	Not available	Rents: \$0.82-\$1.33/sq. ft.
New projects	630 units proposed or in construction; prices range from \$65,000 to \$500,000	9 market-rate projects; 1 affordable housing project; 4 mixed-use projects	1,148 units planned as of 2005; at least 300 will be rental units
<b>DOWNTOWN EMPLOYEES</b>			
Total employees within given radius	25,582 within 1-mile radius; 111,117 within 2-mile radius	41,000 within 3-mile radius	40,000 in downtown area
<b>DOWNTOWN BUSINESS</b>			
Downtown retail	130 shops (19 opened in 2005); sales of over \$110 million (2005)	Not available	76 shops/small businesses
Downtown restaurants	79; sales of over \$50 million (2005)	Not available	Not available
Downtown office space	Over 3 million sf; over 1/3 of office space in Greenville-Spartanburg region; 85% occupancy rate (2005)	Not available	6,000,000 sf; 69% occupancy rate (2003)

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION CASE STUDY COMPARISONS			
	GREENVILLE, SC	LITTLE ROCK, AR	OKLAHOMA CITY, OK
Major employers	Ernst and Young, KPMG regional headquarters, Bowater regional headquarters, major southeastern banks, local government	Acxiom Corporation, Dillard's, Raytheon, Heifer Project International Headquarters, state and local government	City, county, state government; Oklahoma Health Center, Presbyterian Health Foundation Research Park, Sonic Restaurant Corporation (national headquarters)
Downtown hotels	4 hotels—730 rooms	7 hotels	3 hotels—930 rooms; 4 hotels under construction—593 rooms
Downtown event/meeting space	Hotel meeting space (24,000 sq. ft.)	Statehouse Convention Center (114,102 sq. ft; arts center; 24,725 sq. ft. of meeting space); hotel conference center, 3,703 sq. ft	Total: 174,603 square feet (Cox Business Services Center [over 100,000 square feet])
DOWNTOWN ACTIVITIES			
Downtown events	Over 300 in 2005; weekly music series very popular; movies along the river; farmers market; Fall for Greenville (fall festival); Arts in the Park; Reedy River 10K Run	Riverfest (over 225,000 attendees), farmers market (15,000 sf; 100 producers), River Market (10,000 sf; 19 vendors), Art at the Market (17 crafts vendors)	Farmers market; river regatta and art expo; Downtown Arts Festival (750,000 attendees in 2005); Christmas events
Downtown entertainment facilities	Two sports venues	Sports venues; outdoor amphitheater	Sports and entertainment center; concert center
Downtown cultural facilities	County art museum; performing arts center; theater; school for the arts; zoo; library	2 large, several small museums; 2 theaters; 2 arts centers; library; zoo; aerospace center; presidential library	4 museums; 5 theaters; library; national monument
DOWNTOWN GOVERNMENT			
Government facilities	Federal and county courthouses, City Hall, city offices	State capitol; state, county, and city government offices; federal and county courthouses	State capitol; state, county, and city government offices; federal and county courthouses
DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE			
Downtown parking facilities	Over 7,000 City-owned spaces: 11 garages/decks; 6 surface lots; 782 free on-street spaces	2 City-owned garages; numerous private facilities; new 600-800 space City-owned garage planned	20,277 parking spaces (6 City-owned garages/decks and 7 surface lots; 5 private garages/decks and numerous private surface lots)

<b>DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION CASE STUDY COMPARISONS</b>			
	<b>GREENVILLE, SC</b>	<b>LITTLE ROCK, AR</b>	<b>OKLAHOMA CITY, OK</b>
Highway	Not available	Not available	I-40 relocation (removing elevated expressway and creating downtown boulevard); scheduled to be completed 2009-2010
Transit	Downtown trolley	River Rail streetcar	Spirit of Oklahoma trolley system; Amtrak station; water taxi along Oklahoma River; new bus transfer center
Streetscape improvements	1970 streetscape project has matured: tree canopy, Main Street from 4 to 2 lanes with widened sidewalks	\$2 million Main Street project (new sidewalks, lights, banners, plants/shrubs)	\$6 million streetscape projects (sidewalks, trees, lighting); \$500,000 gateway construction project
Downtown wireless connections	Yes; free throughout downtown area	Not available	In development
<b>DOWNTOWN OPEN SPACE</b>			
Open space/recreation facilities	River park with public garden, waterfall; bike and walk trails connect to city's largest park; County Square; Piazza Bergamo; small green spaces and plazas	Riverfront Park	River parks; river trail system; hike and bike trails; downtown parks and plazas; botanical gardens
<b>DOWNTOWN MANAGEMENT</b>			
Downtown development organizations	Main Street Program; 1980s Downtown Master Plan	Downtown Partnership; part of Empowerment Zone	Downtown Oklahoma City, Inc.; Downtown Strategic Plan 2010; Streetscape Master Plan; Business Improvement District; Metropolitan Area Projects Plan (8 civic projects)

### **DOWNTOWN TYLER'S MARKET POTENTIAL**

Can Tyler replicate the success of the downtowns discussed in the case studies? Downtown Tyler has seen incremental improvements in recent years, but change has been slow. Is there a market for a downtown experience in the Tyler region? As part of this plan, ZHA prepared a market analysis for downtown.

### **Tyler's Cultural and Regional Role**

The U.S. Census puts Tyler at the center of a Metropolitan Statistical Region (MSA) that is identical with Smith County and contains approximately 200,000 people. However, Tyler is the economic and cultural center of an East Texas region that extends well beyond Smith County to Anderson, Cherokee, Gregg, Henderson, Rusk, Upshur, Van Zandt, and Wood counties. Residents of East Texas look to Tyler as the regional center for retail, health care and other services. This region contains over 675,000 people, placing Tyler's region within the top 75 metro areas in terms of size, comparable to Little Rock (AR), Greenville (SC), Syracuse (NY), Toledo (OH), and Springfield (MA). Potential investors, who tend to look at the MSA statistics to gauge market size, need to know that the Tyler region is much bigger.

The Tyler economy is attractive to new households and businesses because it is growing and it is affordable. Comparing Tyler's cost of living to the United States average reveals that it is a less expensive location than most in the country. Growth continues both in population and employment. Tyler is well-positioned to attract investment in the future.

In this discussion, "Tyler Region" will mean the broader nine-county region in contrast to the Tyler MSA. Downtown Tyler will be defined as Census Tract 5, which covers the downtown planning area plus the blocks as far south as Houston Street.

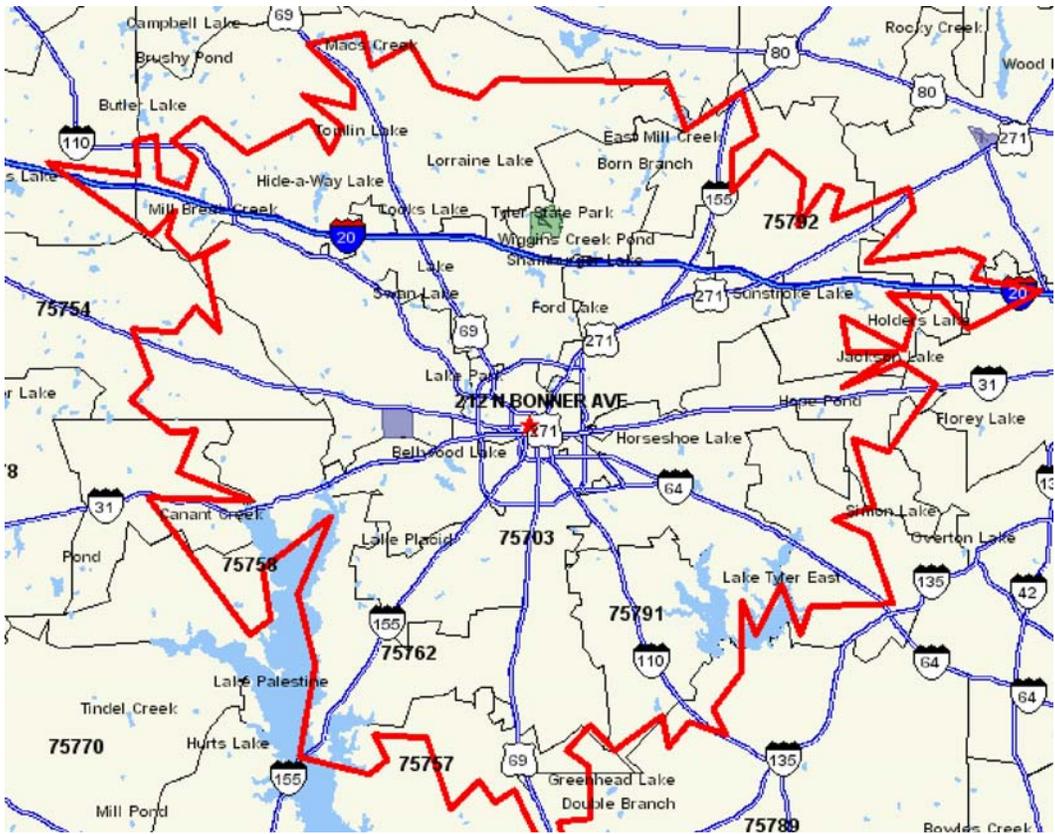
### **Retail Growth**

The City of Tyler is the economic engine and the retail hub of the region. The city's shopping center-inclined retail sales are over two-and-a-half times what would be expected given the buying power of city residents. Shopping center-inclined retail includes retail store types typically found in shopping centers like apparel, music, books, department stores, restaurants—all store types except automobile sales, gasoline service station sales, or non-store retail establishments. The city captures approximately 80 percent of the shopping center-inclined sales within half an hour's drive time to downtown Tyler. Most of the retail sales in the City of Tyler occur outside of downtown Tyler on major thoroughfares like Loop 323 and Broadway Avenue. In general, retail has followed household and income growth to the south of the downtown. From a retail perspective, the "100 percent corner" in Tyler is at Loop 323 and South Broadway. This location is accessible to high-income households and growth areas.

Growth immediately surrounding Tyler and in East Texas will generate demand for additional retail. Over the next five years, growth will support an additional 520,000 to 580,000 square feet of shopping center-inclined retail. This represents an average annual increase of 105,000 to 117,000 square feet per year, which is close to what was absorbed in Tyler in 2005.

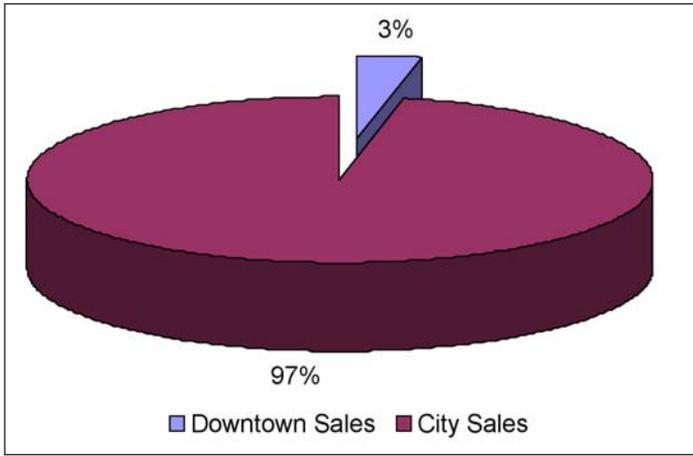
Downtown Tyler today (as defined by Census Tract 5) is capturing only three percent of the city's shopping center-inclined retail sales. Revitalization efforts that have focused on recreating downtown's former role as the central place to shop have not been successful. Today, downtown retail is supported by the captive employee market spending in restaurants and on retail. There are very few regional attractions located in Tyler's downtown

**THIRTY-MINUTE DRIVE TIME BOUNDARY TO DOWNTOWN TYLER**



Source: Microsoft MapPoint; ZHA, Inc.

**DOWNTOWN SHARE OF SHOPPING CENTER-INCLINED RETAIL SALES**



Source: ZHA, Inc.

and limited residential options. To compete effectively for retail investment, the downtown must re-invent its role in the city and regional economies. The downtown must become a destination through social, recreational, cultural, and tourism-related investments. Only with regional drawing power, nighttime activity, successful private investment, and marketplace “buzz” will significant retail investment occur in the downtown. Retail follows growth; realistically, other investments must occur and prove successful before meaningful retail investment will happen.

### **DOWNTOWN RETAIL POTENTIAL**

Low retail sales inflow is a function of the land use mix in downtown Tyler. Downtown Tyler really is not the cultural center of the City of Tyler. If growth continues to move to the south and the downtown’s role within the regional marketplace stays the same as it is today, downtown Tyler’s prospects for retail development are not good. Under status quo conditions, where the downtown is simply a government center with few additional anchors to attract regional visitation, the downtown’s potential is severely constrained by the following factors:

- Household growth is occurring farther and farther away from the downtown and resident-serving retail follows household growth;
- The downtown is not central to upper-income households; in fact, upper-income households are mostly located to the south, placing the downtown on the edge of that market;
- The downtown has lost its prominence as a shopping destination, making it particularly difficult to re-attract the market; and
- Regardless of demographics, the downtown’s physical and functional retail environment cannot compete effectively against new pedestrian-oriented retail products.

A revitalized downtown offers an opportunity to support a retail tenant mix very different from suburban locations. Such diversity within the retail market enhances a city’s economic development potential because it is able to satisfy a broader array of business/employee/resident tastes and preferences. If Tyler’s downtown evolves into the “cultural and social center” of East Texas, there is no reason it should not successfully penetrate the regional retail market. A capture of ten percent of the shopping center-inclined retail expenditure potential would support an additional 50,000 to 60,000 square feet of retail downtown. Approximately one quarter of this space would likely be in eating and drinking establishments.

### **POTENTIAL FOR DOWNTOWN HOUSING**

There are certain household types with tastes and preferences conducive to an urban, rather than suburban, lifestyle. These households are called “urban-inclined.” Target household types include young, single person households; young childless couples; single parent households; empty nester households; and ethnic households. ZHA uses the lifestage and lifestyle data provided by Claritas, Inc., to identify the potential market for downtown living.

There are currently 30,350 households in the Tyler MSA that could potentially be interested in living in a downtown environment and another 53,300 households in the region. According to Claritas, Inc. there are currently 830 households in the downtown as defined by Census Tract 5. The downtown is capturing less than three percent of the urban-inclined MSA market. This could be a function of demand, but more likely it is a function of the residential supply available downtown and downtown Tyler’s limited role in the regional economy.

Because of the character of the households in the Tyler metro area and region, there is significant downtown residential development potential. New, unique products such as urban lofts must be offered in the downtown to capture a portion of this potential. To fully capitalize on the market, the downtown must be re-positioned as the cultural (and psychological) center of the Tyler region. Without such cachet it will be difficult to penetrate the large empty nester market.

TOTAL URBAN-INCLINED HOUSEHOLDS, NEW HOUSEHOLDS AND EXISTING HOUSEHOLDS SURROUNDING TYLER REGION AND TYLER MSA, 2010						
	TYLER REGION		TYLER MSA		TOTAL	
Moving Downtown Household	7,030		5,600		12,630	
Young & Footloose	1,319	19%	2,216	40%	3,535	28%
Urban-Inclined Families	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Empty Nesters	5,712	81%	3,388	61%	9,100	72%

Source: Claritas, Inc.; ZHA, Inc.

New housing demand comes from two sources: households moving into the area and existing households moving into new residential units. Existing households move into new units to “move up” in housing product or they move into new housing units because their housing needs have changed due to the changing nature of their day-to-day lives. An example of the changing nature of life would be moving from the traditional family household with two parents and children at home to an “empty nest” environment when the children have left the family home and are living independently. Often different housing products appeal to different stages of life.



New townhouses and lofts downtown would appeal to the potential market.

There is a large potential market for new housing in downtown Tyler made up of younger households and empty nester households. There are 5,600 urban-inclined households in the Tyler metropolitan market and 7,030 urban-inclined households in the surrounding counties.

Downtown Tyler’s ability to capture this market is constrained by its limited function within the region. Within the next five years, the downtown’s target market needs to be “the young and footloose” who value an urban environment and are more likely to pioneer new neighborhoods. In the near term, it is unlikely that the downtown will capture empty nesters, who tend to be more risk averse.

NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL DOWNTOWN TYLER, 2005-2010							
	TYLER REGION			TYLER MSA			Total
	Mov-ers	Capture Rate	Potential Units	Mov-ers	Capture Rate	Potential Units	
<b>Downtown Target Households</b>							
Young & Footloose	1,319	1.0%-3.0%	13-40	2,216	5.0%-10.0%	111-222	124-261
Urban-Inclined Families	0			0			
Empty Nesters	5,712	0.1%-0.5%	6-29	3,388	0.1%-1.0%	3-34	9-62
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,031</b>		<b>19 68</b>	<b>5,605</b>		<b>114 256</b>	<b>133 324</b>

Source: ZHA, Inc.

Using conservative capture rates, the table above summarizes the downtown’s residential development potential from 2005 to 2010. Between 130 and 320 housing units could be developed downtown, assuming low capture rates.

Products unique to the market like urban lofts and townhouses should help to penetrate the untapped downtown market. Only with additional goods, services, and cultural amenities, as well as regional “buzz,” will the downtown be able to fully capitalize on the local and regional market potential.

Household projections are not available for the 2010 to 2015 time period. ZHA has assumed the same level of growth as projected from 2005 to 2010. Two different scenarios are presented. Under one scenario, the downtown’s evolution as the region’s social and cultural center is slow with investment only in downtown housing. In the second scenario, additional anchors are introduced and/or planned for the downtown, helping to establish and reinforce its role as the region’s social and cultural center.

NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL DOWNTOWN TYLER, 2005-2010		
	Urban Lofts/ Multifamily	Townhouse
Units	80%	20%
Own	25%	
Rent	75%	

Source: ZHA, Inc.

NEW RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL DOWNTOWN TYLER, 2010-2015		
SCENARIO 1: STATUS QUO		
	Urban Lofts/ Multifamily	Townhouse/ Rowhouse
Units	80%	20%
Own	25%	
Rent	75%	
SCENARIO 2: DOWNTOWN REGIONAL CENTER		
	Urban Lofts/ Multifamily	Townhouse/ Rowhouse
Units	66%	33%
Own	40%	
Rent	60%	

Source: ZHA, Inc.

The more conservative scenario generates approximately the same level of residential development potential as the 2005 to 2010 projection. The downtown’s penetration of the young household market is stronger, given residential investment in 2005 and 2010. Under the second scenario the downtown will likely achieve greater penetration of the empty nester market.

NEW MARKET RATE DOWNTOWN HOUSING POTENTIAL BY HOUSING PRODUCT TYPE DOWNTOWN TYLER, 2005-2015						
Product Type	2005-2010		2010-2015		2005-2015	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Multifamily	106	250	241	276	347	526
Townhouse	27	62	60	138	87	200
Total	133	312	301	414	434	726

Source: ZHA, Inc.

The residential product mix will be essentially the same as that recommended in the near term under Scenario 1. If Scenario 2 unfolds there will be greater demand for for-sale housing and townhouse products.

### DIRECTIONS FOR DOWNTOWN TYLER

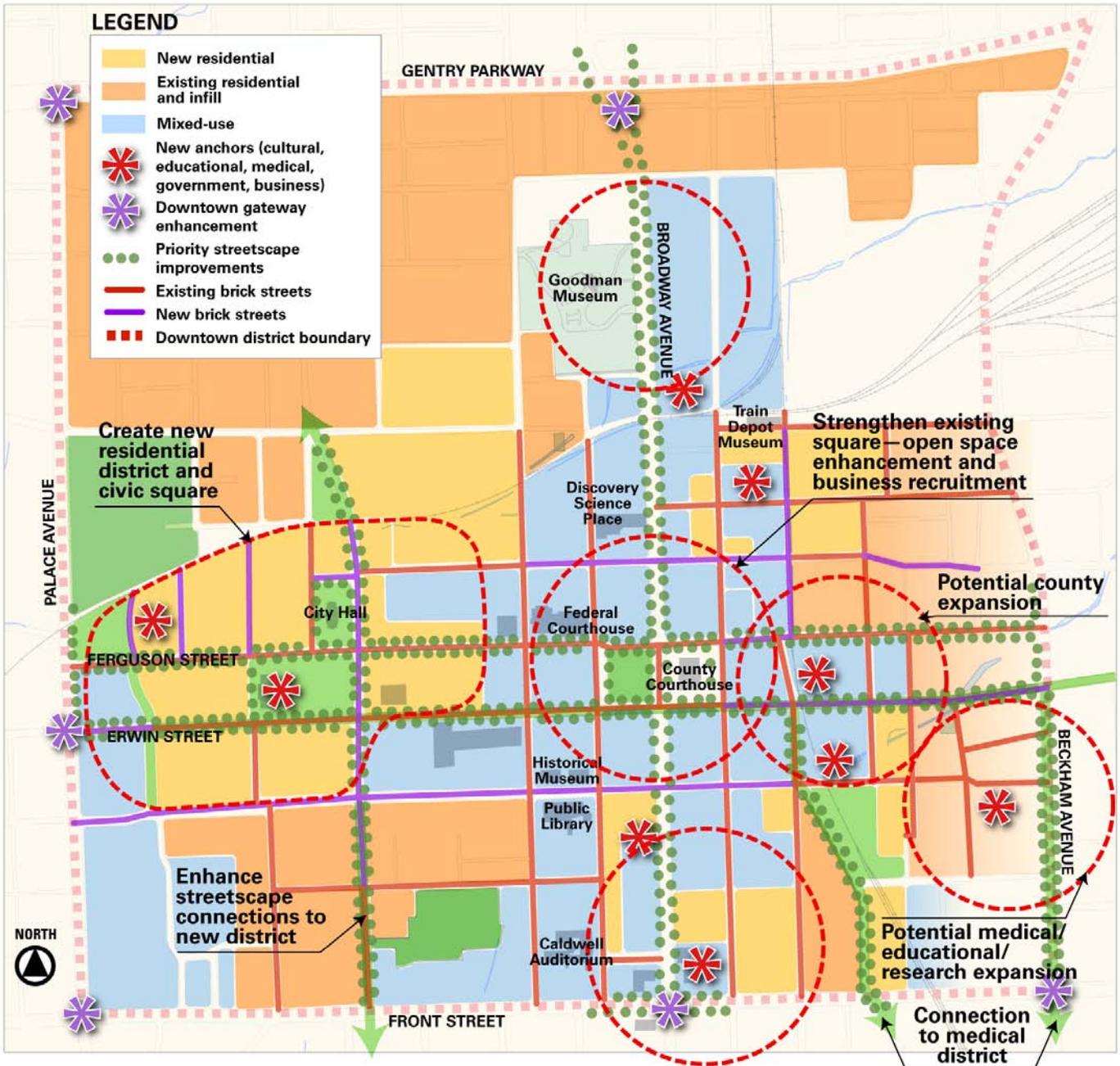
In order to grow and recapture its historic role as the regional downtown, revitalization efforts must build on downtown’s strengths and overcome its weaknesses:

- Reinforce the square.
- Build complementary new districts around the square—north, south, east, and west.
- Add housing wherever possible.
- Add new anchors in each area that attract people and create amenity. The anchors should include each element of the community: arts and culture, education, medical institutions, government, and business.
- Create excellent public spaces.
- Create strong connections, particularly to the medical district.

A conceptual plan exemplifying one approach that applies those design directions is the “Two-Square Downtown” diagram shown below. The conceptual plan identifies the opportunity to create a new western precinct of downtown that would include a new civic square anchored by a cultural institution and surrounded by new housing; new anchors along Broadway Avenue, such as a hotel with meeting space, a community arts center, and a downtown education center; enhancement of the existing square through improvements to the plaza and the public realm and recruitment of new businesses; potential expansion of county government to the immediate east of the square; potential space for medical education/research activity in the southeastern corner of downtown and closely connected to the existing medical district with new pedestrian-friendly routes; and residential infill in the northern and eastern parts of downtown.

The new residential and cultural precinct focused on a new square could be arranged in a number of ways. Two conceptual examples are shown here. However, careful consider-

**TWO-SQUARE DOWNTOWN**

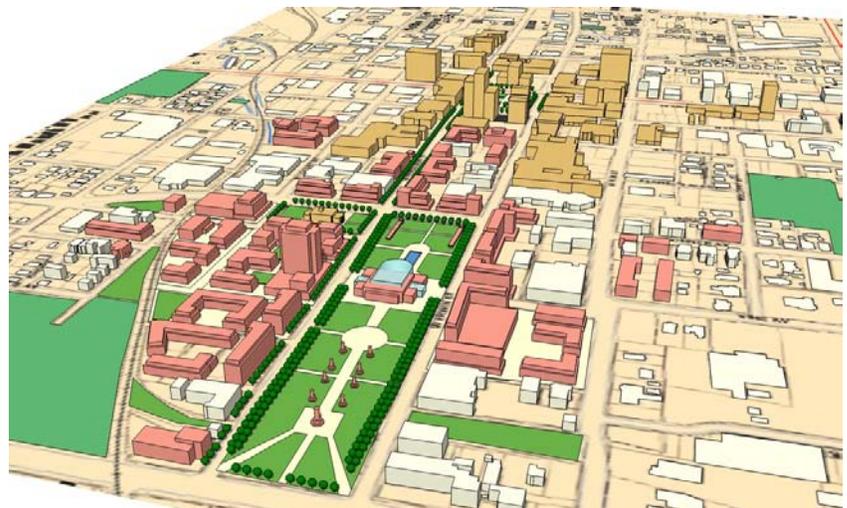


ation of a number of issues is needed to identify the best configuration. In particular, the size of the new open space is important. A too-big space that cannot be properly activated would make new downtown development less successful.

Creating effective connections within downtown and to nearby districts is very important. Given the market profile for downtown housing, it seems likely that many employees of the hospitals in the nearby medical district might fit that pattern. With proper pedestrian and bicycle connections, it would be possible for hospital employees to live downtown and commute without a car. In addition to streetscape improvements to make walking more pleasant, there are also opportunities to create a path through an open space just east of Oakland Avenue and eventually on a multiuse rail-trail. Key intersections on Front Street and Beckham Avenue must be redesigned to accommodate safe crossing by pedestrians.

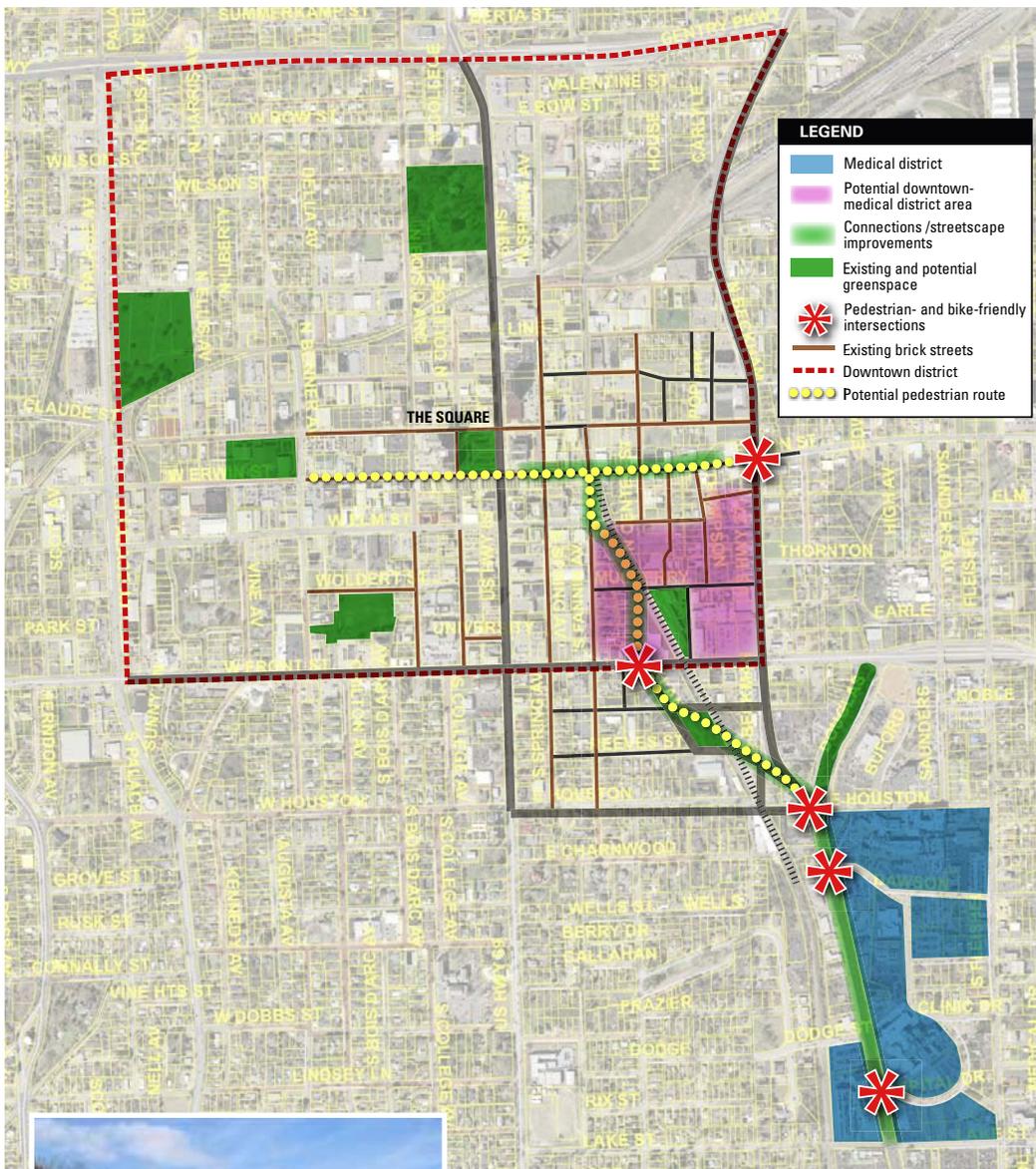


*A new square south of City Hall that is framed by housing and an anchor institution*



*A much larger open space creates a new gateway to downtown and through a residential district.*

CONNECTING DOWNTOWN TO THE MEDICAL DISTRICT



*Opportunity for open space connection near Oakland Avenue*

Improvements needed to create a safe, comfortable and attractive pedestrian and bicycle connection between downtown and the medical district include:

- Sidewalks with shade trees
- Safe intersection crossings with marked crosswalks and pedestrian-activated lights
- New parks along the way.

## B. Recommendations

### **GOAL:**

- 1. Create a full-service, mixed-use “Destination Downtown” that functions as the center of the region.**

Downtown revitalization will require leadership, action, investment and long-term commitment from the City as a partner with the for-profit and nonprofit sectors in creating a new downtown. The Heart of Tyler Main Street Program has been one of the most active partners in downtown redevelopment, but it needs new and stronger partners.

### **ACTIONS:**

- 1a. Convene major city and downtown stakeholders to discuss downtown revitalization.**

All the major economic and institutional interests in Tyler have a stake in the success of the city. Making downtown a regional center will be good for everyone in the city. A blue-ribbon committee committed to downtown revitalization can provide momentum for change.

- 1b. Create a public-private partnership to lead the revitalization of downtown.**

A public-private partnership or development corporation can most effectively take actions and coordinate the different contributions that the private sector and the public sector bring to downtown revitalization. The benefit of such a group is that it can work with more flexibility than public entities while still focusing on the public benefits resulting from downtown improvements and investment.

- 1c. Create a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to support revitalization investments in streetscape and infrastructure.**

A TIF district will provide the revenue to reimburse early public investments in the public realm. Public investment in streetscape and infrastructure attracts private investment and gives the private sector confidence that government will provide the proper environment for investment. After new private development begins to produce tax revenue, it is then directed through the TIF program to repay the City’s early costs.

- 1d. Determine appropriate staff support to promote downtown economic and cultural development and assistance.**

The complexities of downtown revitalization require dedicated staff support, either directly employed or contracted. The staff should have sufficient experience in working with diverse stakeholders and in real estate and should also have a grasp of appropriate urban design.

- 1e. Create a regulatory environment that will attract desired development types and result in desired design outcomes.**

Zoning in the downtown planning area needs to be revised. The Tyler 21 process will provide rezoning to create a new Business, Arts and Culture District. This district will provide for a mixture of uses and design guidelines.

**1f. Make infrastructure investments that support revitalization.**

Investment in the public realm will make downtown attractive to investors and will give them confidence that the City is committed to downtown. A streetscape plan to improve sidewalks, plant street trees, enhance pedestrian crossing of intersections, and install street furniture can transform the pedestrian experience downtown. Other investments may include parks and utility infrastructure.

**1g. Provide incentives for downtown development and redevelopment, such as permit streamlining and tax abatements.**

Select incentives, especially for pioneer developers, should be offered for development of priority sites. Tax abatements are already available for Tyler historic landmarks (see Historic Preservation chapter), but additional incentives can be offered for new projects.

**1h. Establish a land monitoring and tracking capacity in city government.**

City government should have up-to-date information on vacant and underutilized land in downtown (and ideally, throughout the city). The City should establish a downtown GIS archive and update it monthly with information on the status of underutilized and vacant buildings and lots.

**GOAL:**

**2. Create new “urban” residential districts and improve existing districts with infill.**

**ACTIONS:**

**2a. Create a new residential district in the western section of downtown.**

The availability of vacant and underutilized land in the western part of downtown makes it the most suitable area to create a new residential district with some critical mass.



*Infill housing can be developed to create a new downtown residential district.*

**2b. Assist in land assembly.**

The City should assist in land assembly, working with the County on tax title properties and with the downtown development corporation, to the degree possible. City ownership of some of the property in the western land section of the downtown core offers the potential of flexibility in making land available.

**2c. Discuss housing development opportunities with nonprofit owners of large parking lots and vacant land.**

The downtown churches own large parking lots in locations where housing would be a suitable use. The churches could benefit from developing some of that land as residential units, while reconfiguring the parking to continue to accommodate churchgoers and others. This could provide an opportunity for church-sponsored permanently-affordable units within a mixed-income housing development.

There are a number of ways this could happen. The churches could work with a developer to build a parking structure lined with townhouses or other kinds of housing such as condominiums or live-work units whose sale would pay for the parking and provide funds for other church activities. In another scenario, the churches could retain ownership of the land and provide long-term ground leases for construction of parking and housing. A community land trust model based on church ownership of the land could provide housing with moderate rents or purchase prices. Experienced non-profit housing developers could be suitable development potential, with expertise in financial feasibility and design options.



*Under construction*



*Completed project*

*Townhouses can line the edges of parking garages and create an attractive street environment.*

**2d. Offer incentives for housing development.**

Incentives such as tax abatements, permit streamlining, infrastructure relocation and improvements, and other benefits can be offered to pioneer, early developers creating new housing in the new residential district and infill in the existing residential neighborhoods downtown.

**GOAL:**

**3. Support the location of new anchor destinations in downtown with City actions.**

**ACTION:**

**3a. New anchors will be key attractors for downtown.**

Cities as diverse as Providence (RI) and Savannah (GA) have benefited tremendously from investments by educational institutions in downtown facilities. Numerous cities, like the case study communities discussed earlier, have been successful in making downtown museums and performance spaces a keystone of revitalization.



*New anchor destinations, such as cultural facilities, play major roles in downtown revitalization.*

- Explore downtown locations with higher education and medical institutions.
- Provide incentives to attract new anchors.
- Promote downtown arts and culture activities through an existing or new organization.
- Create a downtown visitor center.

**GOAL:**

**4. Enhance the public realm, including existing streets, parks, plazas, and open areas, and create new signature public spaces.**

**ACTIONS:**

**4a. Invest in a pedestrian-friendly streetscape.**

Streets that are friendly to pedestrians will also be friendly to developers of urban-style housing. Except for the immediate area around the square, no one walks downtown because walking is unpleasant or uninteresting. Downtown must become a place for people, not just cars.

**4b. Create or enhance downtown gateways.**

Gateway features alert users that they are entering an area with a distinct identity, such as a downtown. These features enhance the sense of place and typically emphasize aspects of the area's unique character. Tyler's downtown can benefit from strengthened existing gateways along Broadway Avenue and new area gateways, particularly along important east-west streets such as Elm and Ferguson.

**4c. Work with the County to redesign Butler Plaza.**

Butler Plaza's design is dated and needs to be refreshed to serve as an exciting centerpiece for downtown. A modern water feature, perhaps based on the idea of the spring; public art; lush plantings; and plenty of places to sit will make it more appealing. Existing monuments can be incorporated into the new design. The location of underground springs, channelized streams, or a water well said to be at the southeast corner of the square should be identified in order to evaluate the potential benefits and costs of "daylighting" water that has been buried. People are drawn to water and a creative water feature downtown can become a compelling symbol of downtown's rebirth. Any redesign project should include a public process for all stakeholders and build public excitement about a redesigned square as the heart of downtown.

**4d. Create a second public square in the western part of downtown to anchor a new arts and residential district.**

A second public square will anchor the new district and also provide a better setting for City Hall. The square will provide public open space for the new residential district and the potential for public art to identify this area as an arts and culture center in Tyler.

**4e. Bring an interactive water feature to one of the downtown squares.**

Interactive water features or water sculptures have been successful in many cities. Even if Tyler does not have a river or lake downtown, it can create a water feature to rival natural streams.

**4f. Facilitate wayfinding through uniform downtown signage.**

Establish a signage system that provides visitors and residents with clear information about parking, community buildings, attractions, and downtown events. Many Tyler



*A very successful, well-used urban park filled with office workers at lunchtime*

residents believe parking is a problem in downtown today because they do not know that a parking garage exists a half block from the square. Signs for parking and for downtown buildings and attractions are essential.

**4g. Reinforce the existing brick streets identity of downtown.**

Maintain the existing brick streets and, where practical, uncover and repair segments that have been paved over. Experiment with brick paving materials to find the most suitable material that can be used for replacement and for extension within the downtown. Consider using bricks from streets in other parts of town where smaller brick street segments exist, replacing those streets with new asphalt paving.

**4h. Provide incentives for site and façade improvements in existing downtown locations and retail buildings.**

Consider establishment of a Downtown Small Improvements Fund and program that would provide up to \$5,000 for signage, parking lot or façade improvements that meet design guidelines established for the new downtown district. This kind of program has been very successful in many communities and is often part of Main Street programs' design initiatives. In addition to the improvement funds, many programs will provide limited design assistance to business owners.

**GOAL:**

**5. Create a pedestrian, bicycle and parking plan to enhance access and connections to downtown.**

**ACTIONS:**

**5a. Explore the creation of rail-trails downtown.**

Study the feasibility of right-of-way acquisition and funding for design and construction of a multi-use trail.

**5b. Identify pedestrian and bicycle needs, including bicycle racks, and create a conceptual plan.**

Create a pedestrian and bicycle inventory of downtown, identifying needs for sidewalk improvements, crosswalks, extended walk signal times, bicycle lane opportunities, and so on. A conceptual plan for pedestrians and bicycles downtown will set priorities for creating a connected, safe and comfortable public realm. Add these needs to the street and streetscape work plan for downtown. Particular attention should be focused on connecting downtown to the medical district with safe and attractive pedestrian and bicycle routes.

**5c. Explore creation of a parking-management district.**

Parking in downtown Tyler is inefficient because there are so many private parking lots, with some very lightly used. A parking management district would manage all parking within the district through facilitating shared parking arrangements and collecting fees towards a parking garage to serve future development. A public-private new partnership could be a suitable vehicle for building a new parking garage. The street frontage of any garage should be lined with residential, office or retail uses.

### **5d. Promote incremental improvements to existing parking lots, such as ornamental fencing and tree planting.**

Work with existing owners of parking lots to encourage them to improve the lots with amenities. The large surface parking lots in downtown will depress revitalization as long as they continue as wide expanses of asphalt devoid of shade, greenery, and attractive edges between the parking lot and the sidewalk. The Downtown Small Improvements Fund can help fund improvements.

### **5e. Connect downtown to the medical district.**

Create safe connections between downtown and the medical district to the southeast by developing a pedestrian and bicycle path along an open space corridor and making crossing improvements at major intersections along Front Street and Beckham Avenue. An express transit route or shuttle would also promote closer links between downtown and the medical district.

## **DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR DOWNTOWN**

The fundamental design goal for downtown is to create a place, not a project. Focus first on the public realm and public spaces, on reinforcing internal and external connections, and on creating a comfortable and interesting environment for pedestrians. Then make private development relate well to the public realm. Design principles suitable for downtown include the following:

### **General**

- Commercial uses at the street should be built to the sidewalk edge or with small setbacks of 5 to 15 feet for cafés, benches or small open spaces.
- Larger setbacks may be suitable to accommodate street furniture, street trees or wide sidewalks.
- Awnings and canopies are encouraged to provide shelter and enliven ground floor façades.
- Avoid driveway turnaround and vehicle drop-off facilities.
- Buildings over five stories should set back the higher floors by at least ten feet from the principal façade.
- Buildings over five stories should express a base, middle, and top. This may be achieved through changes in material, fenestration, architectural detailing, or other elements. The base should have clear windows to provide transparency (at least 30%) and provide articulation and details to provide interest at the human scale. Retail uses should have 50%–75% transparency.
- Buildings should avoid continuous massing longer than 100 feet facing residential streets and 200 feet facing mixed-use and retail streets.



*Good design for public spaces helps create a sense of place.*

- Drive-through facilities should be discouraged. If necessary, they should be permitted only at the rear of the building.
- Locate loading docks on side streets or service alleys, and away from residential areas.
- Locate buildings at corners. Parking lots, loading areas, or service areas should not be located at corners. Emphasize corners with taller elements such as towers, turrets and bays.
- Use variations in height and architectural elements such as parapets, cornices and other details to create interesting and varied rooflines and to clearly express the tops of buildings.

### Residential

- Include a variety of housing types in residential blocks, including lofts, townhouses, and apartments.
- Create a consistent residential edge, with small setbacks of 5 to 15 feet for stoops, porches, and front gardens.
- Create varied architecture and avoid flat façades by using bays, balconies, porches, stoops, and other projecting elements.
- Provide multiple entrances to the street.
- Maximize the number of windows facing public streets to increase safety.
- Design buildings with individual units and front doors facing the street, including row house units on the lower levels of multifamily buildings. Where residential lobbies face the street, doors should generally be spaced no more than 75 feet apart.
- Blank walls should be avoided along all streets and pedestrian walkways.
- Multiple windows at the ground level are encouraged to allow “eyes on the street.”
- Courtyards and open spaces are encouraged to provide shade for the summer and sun in the winter.
- Residential buildings should be raised above the sidewalk at least two feet to provide a transitional zone between the street and the privacy of the residential building.



*Architectural treatment emphasizes the corner.*

### Mixed-Use Blocks or Commercial Blocks

- Street-level façades should include active uses, such as residential entrances; shops, restaurants, and cafés; services for the public or for commercial offices such as fitness centers, cafeterias, daycare centers, etc.; community spaces, such as exhibition or meeting space; art exhibition space/display windows; commercial lobbies and front doors.



*This small mixed-use building has a distinctive façade for the ground-floor retail, as well as a small plaza with bike racks.*

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- Where there are residential uses over retail, create separate street-level lobbies for residential entrances.
- Housing over retail helps provide the building height needed to frame public spaces.
- Office uses are discouraged from occupying extensive ground-floor frontage.
- Ground floor frontage should generally be permeable and visually articulated as several smaller masses.
- Major entrances should be located on public streets, and at or near corners wherever possible. Entrances should relate well to pedestrian crosswalks and pathways.
- Blank walls should be avoided along all public streets, courts, and pedestrian walkways.

### Parks and Public Spaces

- Surround public parks with uses that create an active environment throughout the day and evening and increase safety for park users, such as shops, cafés and other public uses that enliven the street.
- Locate public spaces to provide multiple points of entry.
- Design public spaces to allow passers-by to see into the space.
- Program activities for public spaces.
- Provide many seating opportunities.



*Sidewalk cafés require wide sidewalks.*

### Streetscape Design

- Sidewalks should be wide enough to allow at least two people to walk together. Appropriate widths depend on the use. At Addison Circle (TX), residential streets have 12' sidewalks and boulevards have 14' sidewalks to allow for outdoor cafés or landscaping.
- Pedestrian lighting should use low-intensity, pedestrian-scale light standards, and distribute light evenly, so that there are no areas of intense shadows.
- Angled parking should have landscaped dividers with trees between spaces.
- Street trees should be planted 20' to 30' on center. Closer is better, but accommodations must be made, if necessary, for storefront signage.

### Parking

- Locate parking to the rear of buildings, or to the side, if necessary.
- Line parking garages with retail or townhouses at the street level.
- Parking lots should be designed to include shade trees in medians that, at maturity, will shade at least 50% of the lot. The design should take into account solar orientation during the summer.
- Large parking lots should be divided into smaller parking fields.
- Parking lots along the street must be visually and functionally separated from the sidewalk by walls, fencing, and/or landscaping.

*Public and private investment and good urban design can transform downtown Tyler today (right) into a vibrant setting with a distinct sense of place (below).*



