
1-EXISTING CONDITIONS

This chapter of the *Downtown Master Plan Update* acknowledges recent success and documents existing opportunities and issues that were compiled from the public process. This chapter lays the foundation for ideas presented in subsequent chapters of the plan.

HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Georgetown was founded in 1848, and named county seat of Williamson County that same year. At that time the “town” was little more than an undeveloped tract overlooking the confluence of the North and South San Gabriel Rivers. Founding father George Washington Glasscock donated 173 acres of land which was quickly surveyed and marked off in a uniform grid of lots and blocks and offered for sale at a public auction on July 4, 1848. This grid system of development, with a central public square donated for governmental purposes, is typical of county seats throughout the state.

Farming the surrounding land appeared to be the principal endeavor of most Georgetown families at this time according to census records of 1850. Other occupations listed in the census records were merchant, trader, grocer, hotelkeeper, and lawyer. Commercial and mercantile establishments were concentrated in the center of the community around the square. The expanded labor force included a comparatively large number of blacksmiths in addition to a tanner, gunsmith, wheelwright and millwright, each serving a critical need in the settlement activities of the young town.

It was not until 1857 that a courthouse stood in its designated central location. Official county business was originally conducted beneath an oak tree two blocks southeast of the square, at the intersection of 9th and Church Streets (now Founder’s Park.) Next, a log building located on the east side of Main Street across from the square, and later a wood frame residence served as the courthouse before a two-story, rubble stone building was erected on the square in 1857.

The last two decades of the 19th century brought great and lasting changes to the appearance of Georgetown. It was a time of robust economic development activity and physical expansion. Having been established as the home of Southwestern University in the late 1870s and tied into a rapidly expanding railroad network in 1878, it was apparent to all that the county seat of Williamson County had a promising future.

Arrival of the railroad facilitated expanded retailing activities as well. Local merchants could stock their stores with products from regional and national manufacturing centers. Downtown Georgetown became an important commercial center for the surrounding area, which supported widespread agricultural and ranching pursuits. First floor storefronts were de-

voted primarily to retail activities with the second floors utilized for residential and more commonly, professional occupation. Attorneys were particularly attracted to available spaces with close proximity to the courthouse.

Once the construction boom began, it swept throughout the central business district and lasted into the early 20th century. The county constructed its fourth courthouse in 1879, a stylized example of the French Second Empire style designed by architects Preston and Ruffini. This high Victorian structure was deemed too small in the early 1900s and razed to allow construction of the present structure in 1910. The current courthouse, visible for miles in all directions, is a restrained example of Beaux Arts Classicism, designed by Austin architect Charles Hall Page. When completed, the imposing structure featured terra cotta pediments with base relief carving and a terra cotta balustrade encircling the roof. These decorative elements were removed from the structure in 1965 to relieve potential safety hazards.

Though the boom period ended in the early 20th century as the population declined slightly between 1910 and 1920, this robust Victorian era left its mark on the city. The growth trend resumed in 1930, but setbacks from the Depression, World Wars, and a regional drought weighed heavily on the local economy. Financial activities in this agricultural region became decidedly conservative and the face of downtown Georgetown changed very little until later in the 20th century.

The advent of the automobile and resulting increased mobility of the local popu-

lation, coupled with the development of regional shopping centers and malls in nearby Austin, caused a tremendous decline in downtown Georgetown retailing in the 1970s and early 80s. In response, concerned citizens and property owners entered into the Texas Main Street Program in 1982. The program was very successful and resulted in the restoration of the majority of buildings on the square and revitalization of the downtown. The program was enabled because of the prior designation of the Town Square Historic District in 1975 which had helped bring attention to preservation in the area. In 1997, Georgetown was named a “Great American Main Street City.” The district was expanded in 1999 and encompasses the eight blocks that surround the historic courthouse and the block on which it was built, which make up the square.



Georgetown Square (Austin Avenue) circa 18??



Georgetown Square (Austin Avenue) today.

GEORGETOWN TODAY

Today, Georgetown is a community of more than 50,000 located approximately 26 miles north of Austin, Texas. In recent years, the downtown core and adjacent residential neighborhoods have experienced revitalization. Recent success has raised Georgetown's competitive edge as a desirable place to start a career, raise children and retire.

Known for its rich history and Victorian architecture, Georgetown has over 200 homes and buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was the recipient of the *Great American Main Street Award* in 1997, the first Texas city ever so recognized. The continued success of the Main Street Program and historic district is apparent, which has enabled restoration of the courthouse and other historic downtown buildings to bring back a sense of heritage. The Downtown Overlay District and mixed use designation of the UDC, design guidelines and the 2003 *Downtown Master Plan* also set forth a modern vision for the future of Georgetown while respecting its past. As growth in Georgetown continues, it will be important to sustain its rich history. A re-evaluation of historic resources, including a historic building survey that follows National Register standards, is encouraged.

PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

Reinvigorating downtown as the heart of the community is well established in existing policies and studies. Background materials that relate to the *Downtown Master Plan* include the *Downtown and Old Town Design Guidelines* (2001), *Unified Development Code* (2003), *2030 Comprehensive Plan* (2008/09), *Future Land Use Plan* (2010), and the *Market Study for Downtown District* (2011). Major policy documents that relate to this plan are described below.

DOWNTOWN AND OLD TOWN DESIGN GUIDELINES

The *Downtown and Old Town Design Guidelines* outline proper treatment and design options for historic and modern properties in downtown. Any modifications to existing historic properties, as well as new construction, additions and signs in the Downtown and Old Town Overlay Districts must follow the parameters set forth in this document. They were adopted in 2001 (revised in 2012) as one of the first products spurred by a commitment to the continued redevelopment of downtown.

UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT CODE

The *Unified Development Code* establishes overlay districts which contain specific development and design standards for special areas within Georgetown. The Downtown Overlay District, which correlates to the *Downtown Master Plan Update* study area, is intended to provide for

the protection of the aesthetic and visual character of the square and downtown Georgetown. It permits a mix of uses and establishes regulations for building height (40 feet maximum,) setbacks, parking, signs and landscaping and buffering.

All development, except for ordinary maintenance and repair, is reviewed in accordance with the adopted *Downtown and Old Town Design Guidelines* by the Historic and Architectural Review Commission (HARC). The location, character, and appearance of proposed development, renovation or redevelopment activity is considered by the committee.

According to Section 4.08.010(C)(2), General Review Criteria:

- The proposed work complies with the Design Guidelines;
- The integrity of an individual historic structure is preserved;
- New buildings or additions are designed to be compatible with surrounding historic properties; and
- The overall character of the Downtown Overlay District is protected.

2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The 2030 Vision Statement supports promoting and revitalizing the downtown by stating:

“In 2030, Georgetown is a growing city, recognized throughout the region and the nation as a premier community of choice by virtue of its exceptional livability; proud historic heritage; welcoming, engaging people; safe neighborhoods; variety of well-paying jobs; excellent public schools; vibrant arts and cultural offerings; and well-planned infrastructure, transportation, and public facilities...”

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

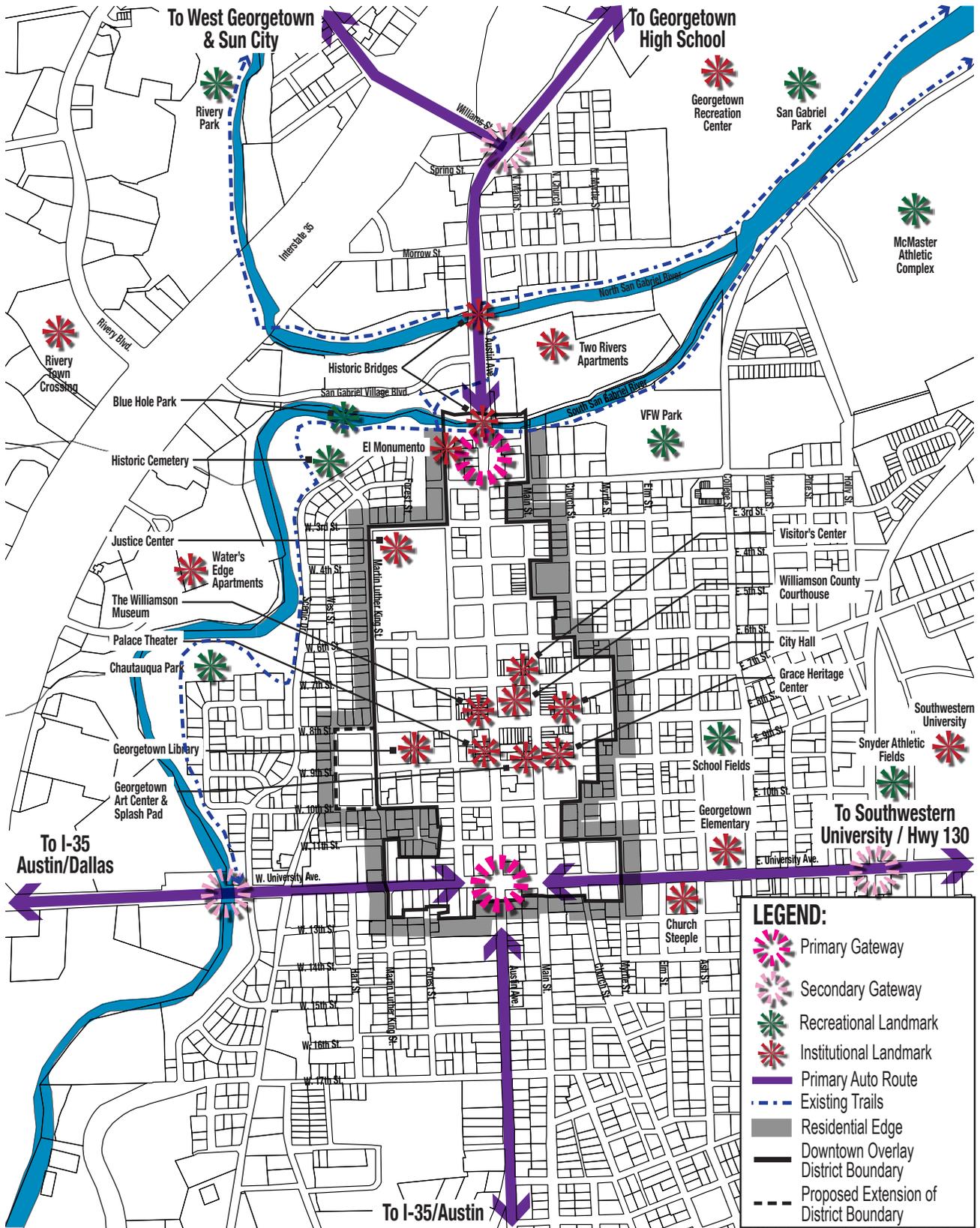
Existing issues and opportunities relating to downtown were identified in a number of public meetings, on-site inspections and focus group sessions. In these meetings, attendees participated in several exercises designed to discuss the state of downtown Georgetown and elicit public opinion on the future of the downtown. Their observations are included in this section.

DOWNTOWN FRAMEWORK

Downtown is organized in a grid system, with the courthouse square at its center. The South San Gabriel River winds along the northern and western edges of downtown, establishing a distinct boundary. Well-established residential neighborhoods frame the southern, western and eastern edges of downtown, which make up the key users of downtown.

Flanking Interstate 35, north and west of the river, lie commercial properties, hotels, auto-oriented commercial centers, as well as multifamily housing.

University Avenue, the primary east-west axis, lies along the southern edge of downtown. The major north-south street, Austin Avenue, cuts through the center of downtown. Both streets have exits from I-35. These streets establish a linear quality to key circulation patterns and land uses within Georgetown.



MAP 3 | EXISTING CONDITIONS

Georgetown Master Plan Update

Georgetown, TX

March, 2014



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FRAMEWORK ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- The downtown core is **clean, pedestrian-friendly and safe**
- The downtown core has an **“urban,”** character, but streets like Austin and University Avenues remain **auto-dominated and “suburban”**
- The Town Square Historic District offers **historic downtown charm, but pedestrian circulation and amenities outside the square is lacking**
- The North and South San Gabriel Rivers provide **opportunities for open space and views, but connections** to the rivers and across them to outlying neighborhoods and amenities **are lacking**
- **Healthy, close-in neighborhoods** about the downtown core
- **Southwestern University** is close by, but not well connected
- **Government offices** are downtown, but not concentrated
- The **Central Library** serves as a downtown anchor
- The **Palace Theater** is an entertainment amenity
- The **Historic Courthouse** is an icon for the county



The Courthouse Square has historic charm and is pedestrian-friendly and safe.

MARKET CONSIDERATIONS

Georgetown’s population is predicted to increase 15.5 percent by 2017, adding another 7,000 or more residents in a short amount of time. The largest growth in population is predicted for ages 55 and older, and young families with children. National trends indicate that these cohorts are seeking more active lifestyles in urban environments with cultural, recreational, shopping and dining opportunities within walking distance of where they live. In other words, they wish to live near a true downtown. The Main Street Program has somewhat answered the call to this trend, particularly around the courthouse square, by building partnerships, promoting a positive image, offering design assistance and identifying new market opportunities to strengthen the downtown core. However, more focus and investment is needed.

Commercial

Opportunity exists in the appeal of the historic character of downtown to attract more residents from the outlying region, for specialty shopping, dining and entertainment. A new conference center (The Rivery) and special events such as downtown festivals and sporting events (Southwestern) will add to commercial market opportunities for downtown. More specialty shopping would support a stronger tourist-oriented market as well.

A continuing dilemma is the lack of consistent hours of operation and limited services in the evenings. The square is said to feel “closed” after dinner and residents would like longer hours and more supportive uses that activate the downtown longer. This in part is a result of a low resi-

1-Existing Conditions

dent population within the district itself that would patronize evening businesses, as well as the lack of a critical mass of uses that would support businesses being open in the evening hours.

New efforts have been made to support students at nearby Southwestern University, such as Burger University, a Town/Gown committee and football events on the square; however, this user group could still use more focus. Providing music and other performances that draw University students, as well as connecting the University and downtown via bike routes for students to have better access would be beneficial.

Finally, commercial market opportunities exist to provide basic services to existing and future downtown residents. The likelihood of developing high quality residential will be limited without these additional amenities. The following is a list of preferred retail and dining businesses voiced by the public:

- More restaurants (including walk-in fast food)
- More outdoor dining
- Groceries, including natural foods
- Bakery
- Brewery
- Clothing, including men's clothing
- Variety / drugstore
- Mail and shipping service
- Computers and electronics
- Cinema
- Art and photography galleries
- Furniture stores
- Specialty stores (card shops, music, hand crafts)



More specialty shopping would support a stronger tourist-oriented market.

Professional office

Downtown is well established as a center for professional offices, particularly those who provide services to individuals and businesses. Attorneys, architects and accountants are among those who have offices in the area, which are mainly located in transformed single family homes. Some “high tech” offices also exist, but in limited numbers, which is another market segment could be better addressed.

Recent trends nationally and in the region show that many smaller technology-oriented businesses will locate in a downtown when floor plate size is adequate (approximately 10,000 square feet,) sufficient telecommunications access is available and amenities for workers are located nearby. Access to restaurants and cafes that may be open late, banks or ATM facilities, and an overall attractive location is desired. For this reason,

developers elsewhere in the country have been successfully locating new offices in downtown mixed-use projects that create a lively retail environment. Tamiro Plaza is an example of a new, modern answer to mixed use with professional offices.



Tamiro Plaza is a modern example of mixed use with professional offices.

Residential

A market opportunity for housing also appears to be un-met. Such housing could be accommodated in upper story apartments of mixed-use buildings or newly constructed townhouses, duplexes and apartments. Nationally, trends demonstrate an interest in urban living when the appropriate amenities are in place. These include attractive streets, parks, dining, entertainment, and employment opportunities. Young professionals and empty nesters are major parts of this market, although many families also enjoy this life style choice, especially in communities such as Georgetown where close-in neighborhoods are attractive and good schools are nearby. Finally, retirees and senior citizens that reside in assisted living facilities are also a potential housing market that can have a positive affect on the downtown. A market for senior housing downtown exists, as well, which is not met adequately.



Recent construction of townhomes in downtown should set a precedent for new housing options.

Cultural and Tourism

While much effort has been made to celebrate cultural aspects and promote tourism in the community, there may still be a larger market opportunity for these uses, especially with the addition of the Rivery Conference Center. Community comments accentuate the desire to add more arts and culture throughout downtown, such as arts spaces and meeting facilities. The recent wine recruitment program could also help boost the viability of more cultural uses and attract tourism.

There have been recent efforts to better market downtown's venues to a larger audience through the Main Street Program, Visitor's Center and Williamson Museum. Guided tours of the restored historic courthouse are given on Fridays and Saturdays and various self-guided walking tours are available at the Visitor's Center on the town square.

Downtown Georgetown was recently awarded “cultural district” designation by the state. It’s assets include:

- Georgetown Public Library
- Georgetown Palace Theater
- Williamson Museum and Williamson County Courthouse
- Georgetown Art Center
- Grace Heritage Center
- Downtown art and craft galleries
- Festivals on the Square
- Public Art
- Southwestern University

Georgetown should market its cultural assets to establish a unique identity for itself and attract more heritage tourism. Other assets that should be highlighted include Blue Hole Park, river trails and the Shotgun House Living History Museum. Downtown could also benefit from more interpretive markers to highlight the history and attract heritage tourism.



Guided tours of the historic courthouse are given on Fridays and Saturdays.

MARKET ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- Georgetown includes a **diverse resident group** to market to - young families, University students, and retirees - but some opportunities are missed.
- Downtown lacks **restaurants, night-life and specialty stores** with longer hours to enliven evening activity, serve its diverse resident groups and attract visitors.
- **City and County government offices** (and other professional offices) located in the downtown also provide a daytime market that isn’t fully met.
- Downtown lacks **high-tech professional office space** to activate downtown daytime businesses.
- **Downtown has historic charm that could attract visitors** seeking cultural attractions, historic resources and specialty shopping.
- Downtown lacks **basic services** (grocery/food, health and personal care and home furnishing stores) that could attract more downtown living.
- Downtown lacks **housing options** to support and encourage more downtown activity and general service needs.

More detail about market opportunities is provided in the Urban Advisors, Ltd. study, *Preliminary Market Overview for the Georgetown Study Area*.

DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

A variety of commercial, institutional and residential uses are permitted within the Downtown Overlay District. In general, the greatest concentration of development is around the courthouse. The intensity of use diminishes in outlying blocks to the east and west and along the Austin Avenue corridor at its northern and southern limits. Transition areas, where the Downtown Overlay District meets existing residential neighborhoods, have been an area of concern as some area residents feel the allowable downtown overlay zoning, in some cases, may disrupt the quaint residential character of abutting neighborhoods. Specific exercises were used in public workshops and focus groups to establish the residents' areas of concern and wishes for future uses and building types. While it is generally agreed upon that more intense uses are needed downtown in order to support the vision, new uses and buildings should be context-sensitive and "good neighbors" no matter where they are located. More discussion on the transition zones is provided in Chapter 3.

Governmental and Institutional uses

Downtown remains a focus of governmental services (both city and county,) which is an important facet of the city center character that should be maintained. While some city services have been relocated to outlying areas, important components remain downtown but are scattered. A long-range goal should be to refocus city offices that serve the public directly in the core area.

A concentration of county offices is also found downtown, most of which is located in the Williamson County Justice Center, which establishes an activity anchor in the northwest section of the business district. The county continues to be a key stakeholder in downtown and their commitment to downtown should be fostered. The county should look at new opportunities that fit their needs, as well as contributes to the overall downtown vision.

Other institutional functions are located downtown, most notably churches along the eastern edge. These form a transition into the residential neighborhood and provide a range of services, including child-care, and youth-oriented activities. They also help to fulfill some needs for meeting and assembly space. They should be recognized for the positive contribution that they bring to the downtown and the community as a whole.

Commercial land use

Commercial uses are scattered throughout downtown. There has been a modest increase in retail and dining within downtown, as well as professional office space. Many existing buildings and tenant spaces have been remodeled to accommodate new uses. Former single family residences have been transformed into professional office space in outlying blocks from the square, which provide a pleasant transition to the residential neighborhoods. This level of activity is good and continues to be desired. More intense mixed-use development should be supported in the future, especially along Austin Avenue, to help bring a more diverse commercial sector offering and desired urban form to Georgetown.



Former single family residences have been transformed into professional office space.

Residential land use

The expansion of residential uses downtown is an issue that relates to the viability of the service retail, dining and entertainment uses, which are a part of the vision for the area. While a mix of uses exists in the downtown, more housing is needed to help support these uses and to establish a secure, active feeling for the area both daytime and night.

There are some loft spaces and apartments located in the upper stories of some downtown buildings, but many are unoccupied and need to be rehabilitated. New townhomes within the district and upper-scale multifamily units just outside the district have begun to respond to this land use gap. In general, there are insufficient amenities, such as parks and service-oriented businesses, to attract people to live in the core as well as a “critical mass” of residential units in close proximity to one another.

Property Ownership

Downtown properties are owned by a diversity of groups and individuals, which reflects the tradition of small-scale en-

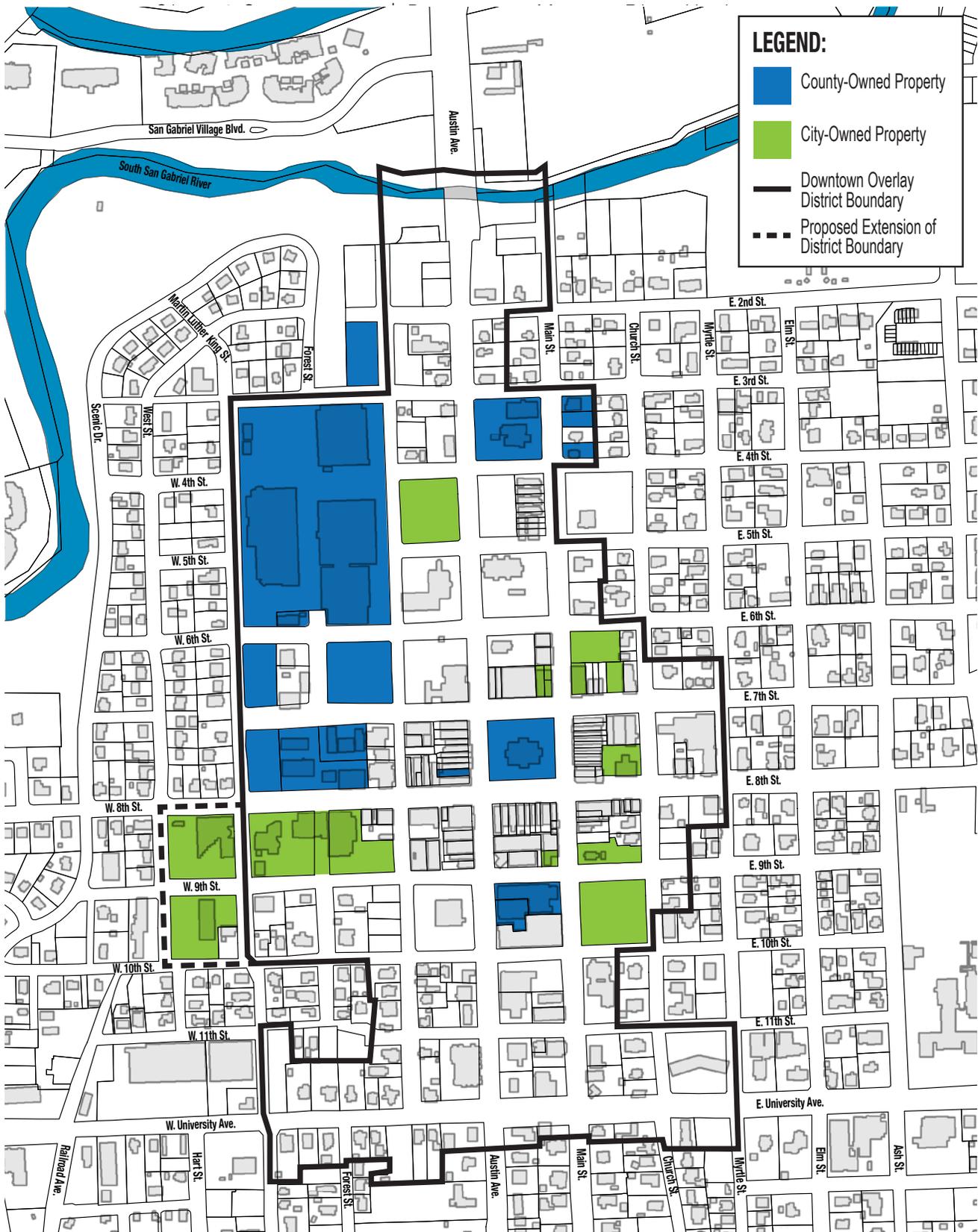
trepreneurial activity. Some exceptions of larger holdings do exist, most notably lands owned by the city and the county. Aside from these large holdings, the task of assembling properties into a parcel large enough for efficient redevelopment could impede improvements in the area. Map #4 on the following page identifies city and county owned properties in the downtown. Individual parcels are also indicated.

General character and identity

While the town square conveys a distinct identity, the remainder of downtown lacks focus, in terms of built character and identity. Retail tends to diminish away from the square, and outlying blocks have a mix of low intensity uses. Some new development has added value to the character and identity outside of the square, but has happened intermittently and not been well connected via continuous pedestrian upgrades and streetscapes. This lack of identity is an impediment to desired development prototypes.

DEVELOPMENT PATTERN ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- **Governmental offices** located downtown is good, but they **should be concentrated** to further maximize their benefit.
- Commercial uses are thriving, but downtown could benefit from **more intense uses** that reach a diverse market segment.
- Recent **higher density residential development** in and around downtown is successful and should continue to be implemented.
- **Assemblage of smaller parcels** for higher intensity development could be difficult.



LEGEND:

- County-Owned Property
- City-Owned Property
- Downtown Overlay District Boundary
- Proposed Extension of District Boundary

MAP 4 | CITY AND COUNTY OWNED PROPERTIES

Georgetown Master Plan Update

Georgetown, TX

March, 2014



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PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION AND TRAILS

Pedestrian circulation is well established around the square and some recent upgrades outside the square have occurred. Most notably, the improvements along South Main Street have been a huge success. Better walkability and use of the upgraded public parking lot (9th & Main) have generated more pedestrian activity along Main Street. However, the pedestrian system is not continuous, and as a result, outlying businesses miss a lot of potential foot traffic. For example, in some locations (especially along Austin Avenue,) no sidewalks exist and the entire front of the property is allocated to pull-in parking. In these areas, no safe place exists for pedestrians. This discontinuity of clearly defined, safe and comfortable sidewalks is a significant impediment to new development and economic activity. Other safety concerns include the lack of safe crosswalks, especially at busy intersections along Austin Avenue.

Aesthetic concerns within the pedestrian system include the lack of a consistent design and hierarchy of sidewalks. Overhead power lines are also unsightly, although a program is in place to relocate them and should be continued.

A recreation trail exists along the banks of both the North and South San Gabriel Rivers, but its location is not identified for downtown users and connections to the trails from downtown are not apparent. This will become even more important when the new conference center is built.

Public art also contributes to a positive pedestrian experience. The existing pub-

lic art program, which is run by the Arts and Culture Board, has helped escalate the quality of the pedestrian environment and should be continued. Numerous contemporary sculptures and artistic “wraps” of power transformers can be found surrounding the downtown square.

PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- **Sidewalks are deteriorated** or missing in outlying areas of downtown, which hurts business.
- **Handicap accessibility** is limited.
- More **trash and recycling** receptacles are needed.
- More **public art** to enhance the walking experience is needed.
- More **trees and landscaping** are needed.
- Continue program to **relocate overhead power lines**.
- Austin Avenue crosswalks are unsafe because of the lack of **signalized crossings**.
- **Pedestrian scaled lighting** in outlying blocks is lacking.
- More **bicycle racks** are needed.
- A **bike rental program** would promote bicycling downtown.



Sidewalks are missing in areas of downtown and overhead power lines are unsightly.



More bike racks are needed downtown.

AUTOMOBILE CIRCULATION

While convenient automobile access into downtown is an important consideration, and a certain degree of “busy-ness” in traffic helps to animate the area, it should not constrain pedestrian activity. Achieving a balance of efficient automobile and pedestrian circulation is a key concept.

Reallocating Austin Avenue from a state highway to a local street has helped automobile circulation and volumes immensely. While Austin Avenue traffic has improved, it is still seen as a major barrier between the east and west sides of downtown. A more defined streetscape with trees, landscaping, on-street parking and other amenities would help to reduce the scale of the street and slow down traffic. More traffic or pedestrian-activated signals along the corridor could also help facilitate slower speeds and invite pedestrian activity, which would contribute to the overall sense of identity and entrance to downtown.

University Avenue, the main east-west entrance into town, continues to be a concern. Its auto-oriented uses promote high traffic volumes and speeds which makes it very unpleasant to walk along. New sidewalks and streetscaping are proposed for this corridor.

One special asset to note is the fact that all downtown streets are two-way. This is generally a positive element for promoting retail development and is an asset to be maintained.

AUTO CIRCULATION ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- Austin and University Avenues continue to be **auto-dominated and uncomfortable** for pedestrians.
- A **more defined streetscape** will help slow down traffic and accommodate pedestrians better.
- More **signalized pedestrian crossings** on Austin Avenue are needed.
- More **public transit** options are needed.



Austin Avenue (shown) and University Avenue carry high traffic volumes but are unpleasant for pedestrians to walk along.

PARKING

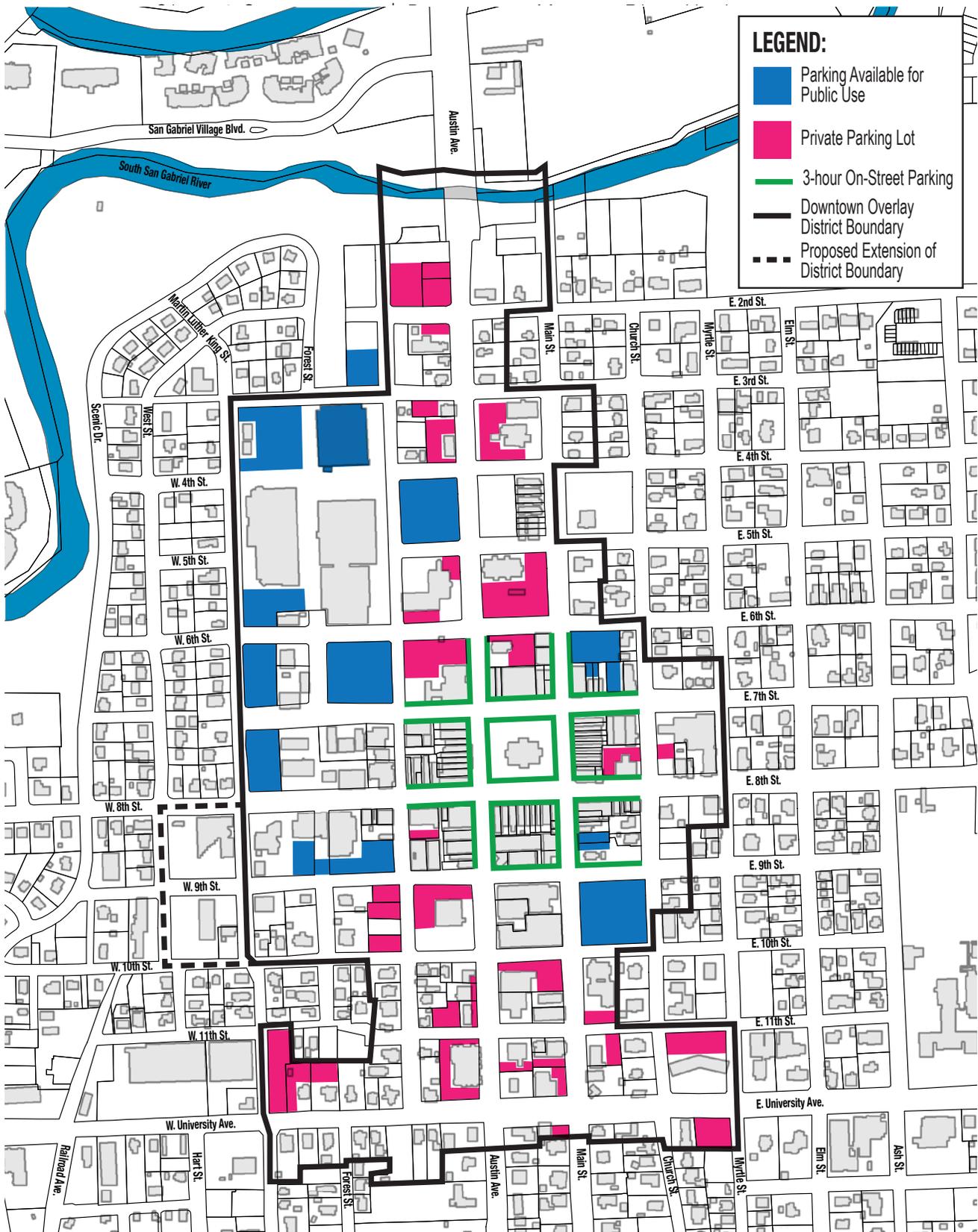
Parking downtown is provided in a variety of on-street and off-street configurations (see Map #5.) The classic comments about lack of sufficient parking arise in Georgetown, as it does in most communities of this size. However, survey results suggest that most people only find downtown parking to be an issue at peak times and most people will walk at least four blocks to get to their destination once parked. To some extent, additional parking may be needed and a public parking structure with a retail component is desired. But first, the community should confirm that existing parking resources are used to their highest potential. A recent staff parking count suggests that within a two to three block radius of the courthouse, there are approximately 1,270 spaces. However, a more detailed parking inventory could be useful to evaluate potential growth impacts on parking supply.

In some cases, off-street lots are restricted for use by individual businesses and their patrons. Others are public, but not well identified. These lots and their restrictions should be made apparent through proper signage and pedestrian links should be enhanced. Effective management of on-street parking is an improving, but continuing issue. Close-in spaces are restricted to three hours to insure short-term turnover for customers. Programs to encourage employees to park farther away are still cited as being less effective than they should. A key issue is the lack of a formal parking district, which could address management and enforcement of existing parking resources and construction of new facilities.

A special issue is the relationship of parking to development density. Ideally, parking would be concentrated in multilevel structures, to reduce the amount of land area that is allocated to it. This then permits more intensive development of preferred uses on nearby parcels. The dilemma is that construction costs of structured parking are high and current land values may not justify it when associated with market rate development. In almost every community of this scale, structured parking must be developed through a district mechanism (more discussion on parking districts is discussed in Chapter 5,) to overcome these costs. In time, the benefit to the community is realized through increased value and economic activity. This means that structured parking must be addressed more as a policy decision rather than a short term cost/benefit question. It is in essence an economic development strategy.

PARKING ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- Existing surface parking lots are **not clearly marked and accessible**.
- Surface parking lots **take up valuable land**.
- Public parking is **not evenly dispersed** throughout downtown.
- **Time limits** for parking are not strictly monitored.
- **Employee parking** should be limited to nearby off-street surface lots to free up convenience (on-street) spaces for customers.
- **A public parking structure and parking district** could increase development opportunities.



MAP 5 | EXISTING PARKING RESOURCES

Georgetown Master Plan Update

Georgetown, TX

March, 2014



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GATEWAYS, SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

Many of the resources of downtown are well-kept secrets. To the infrequent user and visitor, even the location of downtown as a whole may be a question. A *Wayfinding and Signage Master Plan* was created in 2005 and numerous signs around town were implemented as a result of it. However, the program ceased shortly after it was implemented and so downtown still lacks proper signage and wayfinding in many areas. The public recommended sprucing up the signs with better graphic appeal, perhaps incorporating something like the poppy icon to bring a local identity to them. Residents also desired more interpretive signs around town.

Gateways provide a sense of “arrival” to a destination or place. Major gateways into downtown have been identified as the intersection of University Avenue and Austin Avenue to the south and at the historic bridges crossing the San Gabriel Rivers to the north. These areas still lack a sense of arrival and should be enhanced.



The bridge over the South San Gabriel River could be enhanced to become an apparent gateway into downtown.

GATEWAYS, SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- There are only a few signs along automobile routes that tell motorists where destinations are. Most of these signs are **too close to the destination** itself and do not help with wayfinding.
- Signs **to and from downtown parks and surrounding hike and bike trails** are limited.
- Signs along river trails and urban trails are needed that tell pedestrians where **downtown resources** are located.
- Coordinated signs to locate **parking facilities** are needed.
- **Signage is lacking** for downtown amenities and public restrooms.
- No **directories** are provided in parking lots for pedestrians.
- **Gateways are not clearly marked**, so it is not apparent that one has entered downtown.



The signage program should be reimplemented and improved with better graphics.

PARKS & OPEN SPACE

The courthouse square remains the most important piece of open space downtown. It is a symbolic focus, as well as the location for many events. Founder's Park is historically significant, but residents complain that the size of it is too small to be actively used. In addition, portions of some streets around the square are occasionally closed to accommodate festivals and market days, which are successful events that should be continued.

Blue Hole Park, located at the edge of downtown on the South San Gabriel River, is a wonderful amenity, although the pedestrian connections to it for downtown and other area users are not well developed or defined. The new trail along the western edge of the district, flanking Scenic Drive, will improve connections to the park, but more connections and visibility are needed, as well as more active uses along the park to increase safety. New user groups such as families should be targeted and more active uses such as housing and a playground could help activate the park and make it more of a destination.



Blue Hole Park should be better promoted and pedestrian connections to it and the river trails from downtown should be improved.

Other park space is limited. The downtown lacks a sufficient amount of plazas and green spaces to attract the diversity of users that is desired. This is particularly an issue for providing amenities that downtown residents would seek. Even providing sufficient playground space for day care services is an issue. Providing sufficient space for larger outdoor events is also a need.

PARKS & OPEN SPACE ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- More **public art** is needed.
- More **shaded plazas** with seating is needed.
- Downtown lacks space for **festivals and events** outside the square.
- Outdoor amenities for families and children such as **tot lots/playgrounds** are lacking.
- **Blue Hole Park** is a wonderful amenity, but not successfully marketed as such.



Founder's Park is a wonderful amenity, but is too small to be actively used.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The recent and projected growth of the City of Georgetown presents great opportunities. In response, the issues as outlined in this chapter, need to be addressed and a sustainable vision must be guided.

The issues facing the long-term success of downtown can be summarized into the following eleven general statements. These “summary statements” form the basis for key strategies in this plan. This plan addresses these issues and recommends appropriate actions for improving them.

1. While the square is an attractive place to do business, activity diminishes just past the four primary block faces. The intensity of uses in these outlying areas should be built up and redevelopment of under-utilized land should be promoted.



Redevelopment of underutilized land should be promoted.

2. Georgetown should cater to its diverse population and market segments while also attracting outsiders through cultural offerings and heritage tourism.

3. There is a strong need for more basic services, retail, restaurants and entertainment venues, and for businesses to stay open longer.

4. There is a need for more downtown residential development to help support the retail and commercial uses.

5. The pedestrian system is good around the square, but it erodes once away from it. While some recent improvements have been made, the system as a whole is still unconnected. Priorities for downtown sidewalks need to be made and implemented.



Priorities for downtown sidewalks need to be made and implemented.

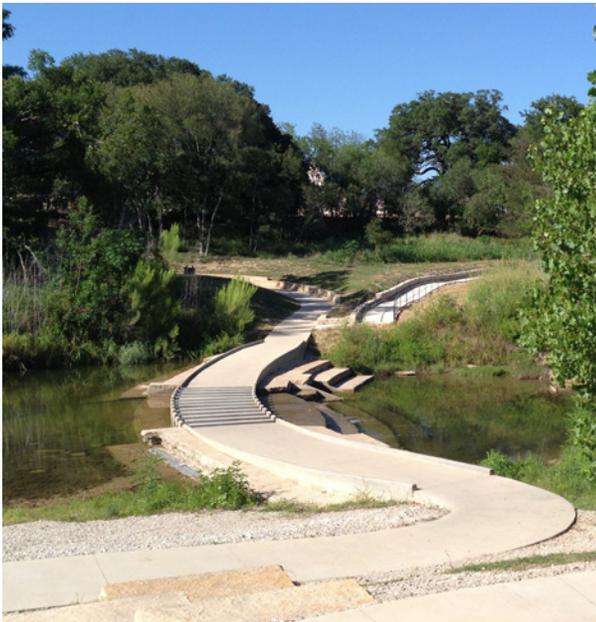
6. Traffic volumes and speeds along Austin Avenue, as well as the lack of marked crossings, discourage pedestrian activity.

7. Parking that is currently available is not clearly marked and managed to the extent possible and excess surface parking lots take up valuable land for redevelopment.



Parking that is currently available is not clearly marked and managed to the extent possible.

8. Some downtown assets are not well-known and others are not used to their potential levels.



Some downtown assets (Blue Hole Park and river trails) are not well-known or used to their potential levels.

9. There is a lack of signage to lead visitors into the downtown and to surrounding amenities and downtown lacks an identity outside of the square.



There is a lack of signage and identity outside the square.

10. The primary gateways into downtown (University/Austin intersection and San Gabriel River bridges) should be enhanced to provide an identity and awareness that one is entering the downtown.

11. The downtown lacks formal parks and plazas with amenities for all ages.