

2-FRAMEWORK STRATEGY

The *Downtown Master Plan Update* is based on a framework of organizational concepts that should guide investment in the area. All of the components of the plan build on these general precepts. This chapter presents a summary of all of the components of the plan as they would work in concert in a basic framework. These are then explained in more detail in subsequent chapters.

A VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

Downtown should remain the heart of the community, with an even more vigorous economy and diversity of offerings. It should be the center of specialty retail, dining and entertainment. In the business sector, it should maintain a key position in professional services and establish itself as a focus of high technology firms, especially innovative start-ups.

Downtown also should strengthen its role as the center of government, with major concentrations of city and county offices in the form of a Municipal Center as well as some state and even federal workers.

In addition, it should be the cultural center of the city. Museums, galleries and performance venues should thrive here and the central library should continue to be a key activity center. Conferences from the Rivery should bring regional residents to downtown, and festivals and outdoor markets should continue to add accent to daily life here.

Downtown also should be an affordable place for people to live. In that regard, new housing should be developed that caters to “urban” markets.

HOW WILL THE DOWNTOWN APPEAR?

With the implementation of this plan, downtown will be an exciting, attractive place to work, live and visit. As one approaches the downtown, one sees established residential neighborhoods that are well maintained, and that are easily accessible to downtown. Within the downtown district itself development along the edges of these established neighborhoods blends, with compatible buildings housing services for downtown residents. In some areas townhouses and apartments/condos create a transitional edge between single-family homes and the commercial core.

People of all ages come downtown to make use of many community facilities, including youth and senior centers, theaters, outdoor parks and plazas. Visitors find their way about through a series of custom-designed signs that are attractive and easy to understand. Outlying signs highlight entry into the city core. Gateways into downtown are apparent and the feeling that one has entered a special place is recognized. As one nears parking facilities, it is easy to find parking lots by following other specially illustrated

signs. One can park in a landscaped lot that is screened from pedestrian view by storefronts and other buildings or in a well-designed, multi-level parking structure with retail to activate the ground floor.

Landscaped sidewalks invite pedestrians to walk comfortably for four or more blocks while they conduct their business, visit with friends and check out entertainment venues. Sidewalks are extended throughout the downtown and crosswalks with special decorative paving identify key intersections and enhance safety. The east and west sides of downtown are seamlessly connected with an attractive, pedestrian-friendly atmosphere along Austin Avenue, where pedestrian-activated crosswalks make crossing it more safe and convenient.

At the western edge of downtown near the library, a Municipal Center includes a new city hall and various city service offices. The northern portion of Austin Avenue has redeveloped with a mix of retail, office and residential buildings. Within the historic district, buildings are restored to a functional beauty. Numerous institutional facilities provide services for those who live, work and visit downtown. In the southern portion of downtown, a mix of offices, retail and residential uses have filled out vacant lots and helped to create a pedestrian-friendly environment.

In the core area, street level storefronts are occupied by specialty retail establishments, including clothing, gifts, galleries, housewares and furnishings. Restaurants, theaters and youth activity centers enliven this mix of customer-oriented activities.

With more people living in the downtown core, streets remain active into the evening, such that the area genuinely functions as a twenty-four hour place—business and cultural activity during the day and evening and residential throughout the night. Citywide residents and visitors enjoy using the downtown’s evening business hours and entertainment venues.

A MARKET STRATEGY

The vision for a vital downtown is based on some key market-driven principles. These provide opportunities for strengthening the core. This renaissance must concentrate on enhancing the core with a mix of uses, including higher density residential, commercial and cultural attractions.

The downtown revitalization strategy focuses on several key market segments:

CITY RESIDENTS

The spending power of many Georgetown residents is comparatively high. Taking advantage of this disposable income is important for downtown. Expanding the market of people that want to live in the core will help. Residents of Sun City and other established neighborhoods throughout the city are also part of the general market.

DOWNTOWN WORKERS

New venues are needed for innovative technology-based enterprises. Goods and services targeted at this group should be expanded.

A special target group consists of government employees who work downtown. Providing coffee shops, cafes and personal services are among the uses that will appeal to this group. While this segment is well established, it does not patronize downtown businesses as much as it could.

REGIONAL VISITORS

Regional visitors with sufficient disposable income will come downtown for specialty retail, restaurants, cultural attractions and special events if the setting is appealing and access is easy. This includes those who come for performances and festivals as well as conferences. Businesses that cater to visitors also should be expanded, including lodging for visitors and tourists.

HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage tourism, a growing national movement, includes travel to natural, historic and cultural attractions and focuses on historical authenticity, accessibility and local involvement.

Heritage tourism balances visiting interesting places with preservation of history and the built environment. Georgetown is well positioned to expand its market to include those visitors interested in visiting a historic Texas city.

Downtown, therefore, should be designed to appeal to this group. The Visitor's Center is a wonderful asset that promotes this type of tourism with special flyers, guided tours and advice. The wineries have also helped elevate heritage tourism in Georgetown. Promoting other heritage

icons like Blue Hole Park and the Shotgun House Museum is desired. Gifts and other specialty retail, entertainment and exhibits should be available.

STUDENTS

Georgetown is home to the oldest chartered institution of higher learning in the state: Southwestern University. With an enrollment of nearly 1,400 students, the university provides an opportunity for businesses to address students' needs and interests. Expanding the dining and entertainment venues, as well as other goods and services that appeal to this group is a priority.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Services that cater to independent senior citizens who choose to live within walking distance of downtown are also encouraged. These include services such as cleaners, drugstores and restaurants, as well as cultural opportunities, community services, churches and medical practitioners. Living downtown could be a very attractive housing opportunity for this market segment that makes up nearly 25% of Georgetown's population.

URBAN DWELLERS

For the first time in post-World War II history, city centers are growing faster than their suburban counterparts. Nationally, cities of this size are demonstrating that approximately 4% to 6% of area residents would choose to live downtown if high quality housing is provided in an enriched environment with sufficient amenities. People considered "empty nesters" and "young professionals" are among those in this group that should be targeted to help enliven downtown.

THE FRAMEWORK STRATEGY

Downtown should be strengthened by providing safe connections for pedestrians, offering adequate parking for both local and tourist traffic, enhancing the visual character and encouraging development of key “opportunity areas.” All of this can and should be accomplished while respecting its heritage. Map #6 on the following page illustrates this basic strategy.

MAJOR FRAMEWORK STATEMENTS

The following statements and their intents are described to explain the major themes for this plan. Each element is described in more detail in later chapters. They all relate to Map #6 on the following page.

EXPAND THE PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED CORE.

While enhancing the pedestrian environment throughout downtown is a general goal, a key concept is to expand the area in which the appeal to pedestrians is the strongest. Conceptually, the expanded pedestrian-oriented core would extend an additional block and a half, or approximately one-eighth of a mile radius in each direction from the historic courthouse. (This area is shown in yellow on the map.) In some cases, specific existing developments and abutting land uses would modify the actual layout of this area, but diagrammatically, this should be considered to be a larger city center.

ENHANCE THE PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE

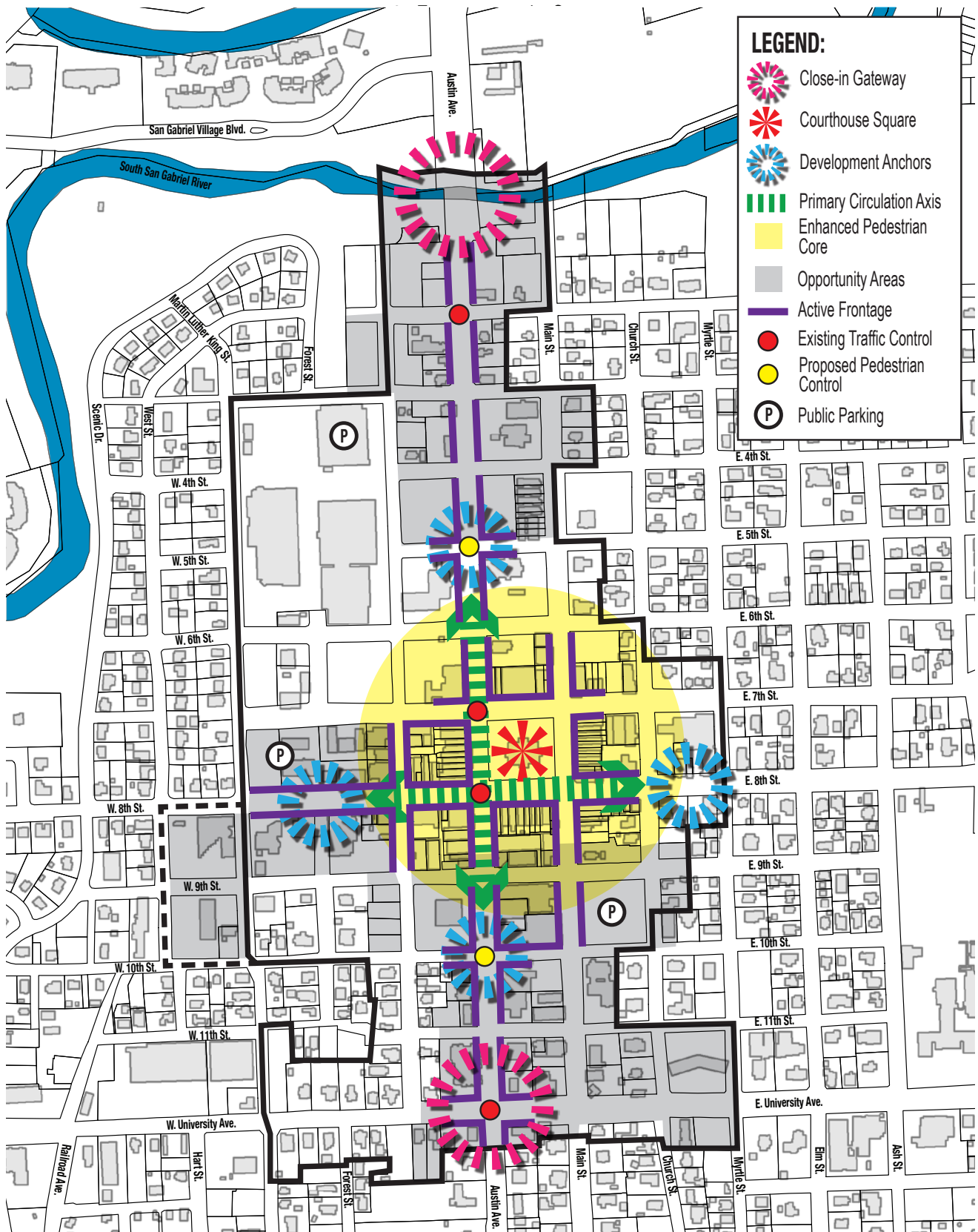
Pedestrian ways, trails and streets should be considered in a broader context. They are a means of circulation that strengthen business centers and link neighborhoods. Therefore, roadways, sidewalks and trails should be coordinated in a comprehensive hierarchical system that assures continuity of circulation, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists. Installing streetscape improvements throughout the area will help, as well as pedestrian-related signs, such as ones that indicate walking distance or time to certain destinations.

ACCENT GATEWAYS

“Gateways” should be established at key points along Austin Avenue. They would incorporate design elements that convey the theme for downtown and should fit within a hierarchy of wayfinding signs and landscapes. Other wayfinding signs and landscaping should be installed at key intersections.

CREATE A DESTINATION WITH A DIVERSE MIX OF USES

Downtown Georgetown should retain its role as the community’s center. Retail uses, government services, county offices, professional offices, cultural, art and entertainment facilities, support services, and residential uses should combine to create the mix that is downtown. A diversity of employment opportunities should be provided to encourage a diversity of people, ages and income levels. Doing so means that a wide variety of personal services are necessary to meet the needs of these people. Improved parking and pedestrian systems should support access to these features.



LEGEND:

- Close-in Gateway
- Courthouse Square
- Development Anchors
- Primary Circulation Axis
- Enhanced Pedestrian Core
- Opportunity Areas
- Active Frontage
- Existing Traffic Control
- Proposed Pedestrian Control
- Public Parking

MAP 6 | BASIC FRAMEWORK STRATEGY

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ANCHOR ACTIVITY

Certain “anchors” of activity will pull pedestrians outside the courthouse square. These anchors of activity should offer a range of services and amenities that do not exist in the downtown core. Some of these anchors already exist, or are beginning to be developed, while others should be cultivated in time. They include:

- **North Anchor:** the Monument Café and Tamiro Plaza at 5th and Austin offer a mix of uses that currently draw pedestrians from the square. More development should follow in this direction, continuing north along Austin Avenue to the river, while also activating Rock and Main Streets.
- **West Anchor:** the new central library serves as an important anchor of activity. Existing government facilities should be reconfigured and expanded into a Municipal Center at this location to further anchor this area and draw people from the downtown core.
- **East Anchor:** a collection of churches and a new events center, Union on 8th, serves as an informal anchor east of the square. Grace Heritage Center and the redevelopment of the old post office, once city offices relocate, should also contribute to the east anchor of activity.
- **South Anchor:** new mixed-use development along Austin Avenue south of the square will help anchor the southern edge of downtown. This could include the redevelopment of the blocks around 10th Street and Austin Avenue, where a new pedestrian-activated crossing is proposed. New development should orient to Austin Avenue to create a more pedestrian-friendly atmosphere and southern entry to town.

ACTIVATE PUBLIC REALM

Encouraging new development to include active ground-floor uses in targeted areas of downtown (shown on Map #6 in purple lines) will help to create the sense of identity and desired vision for downtown. Currently, the blocks directly facing the square are the block faces in downtown that include a majority of active front-ages. This vision would help extend this building type and uses into outlying areas as well. Expanding concentrations of active ground floor uses like specialty and service retail, dining and entertainment will help position the entire downtown as an exciting place, distinct from regional suburban mall models.

IMPROVE ACCESS FOR VISITORS

It is important for all users to know the most convenient route to their destination. Signs that identify these routes, as well as the location of parking lots and other regional attractions are necessary. Re-implementing a town-wide sign system, with design improvements, would greatly aid both downtown entities and other local facilities and attractions.

MARKET DOWNTOWN ASSETS

Establish a Retail Recruitment Program to target specific businesses and industries, and strengthen marketing and events programming. Implement a heritage tourism plan and facilitate compatible development projects.

URBAN DESIGN SYSTEMS

Urban design systems should be coordinated to achieve this plan's objectives. Among these are: circulation systems for pedestrians, bicyclists and automobiles, as well as street design, public information, parks and open space.

Urban design system improvements to be made include:

- Enhancing the pedestrian experience
- Extending streetscape elements beyond the historic core
- Expanding and enhancing parks and open space in downtown
- Balancing auto circulation with other circulation and functional requirements for pedestrians
- Improving the use of existing parking resources and developing new parking such that it will stimulate construction of other desired uses
- Re-implementing a cohesive wayfinding and signage system
- Managing and promoting historic resources

PEDESTRIAN SYSTEMS

Pedestrians circulate throughout downtown using the grid of sidewalks that frame the city blocks. Enhanced sidewalks exist in the Town Square Historic District and in some locations along Main Street and Austin Avenue. The city has been quite aggressive with previous pedestrian circulation systems and this plan will build on top of those recommendations to offer priority treatment and updated designs.

Pedestrian system enhancements to be made include:

- Improving connections from major destinations to public parking.
- Enhancing connections between downtown and the University.
- Providing pedestrian-controlled crosswalks at key intersections on primary pedestrian routes.
- Enhancing pedestrian connections to the river trails to access residential and overnight accommodation establishments across the South San Gabriel River.



Enhance pedestrian connections to the river trails.

STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

Streetscape enhancements, which follow recommendations from the original Master Plan, have been provided for the Town Square Historic District and along portions of Main Street and Austin Avenue. The enhancements include decorative paving, ornamental street lights, benches, waste receptacles, signs and plantings. These landscape and furniture palette elements are organized in a hierarchical system that relate to the pedestrian circulation recommendations, but they are not continuous. Some signs have also been implemented to direct users to the retail core.

Streetscape enhancements to be made include:

- Establishing priorities for sidewalk improvements and streetscapes.
- Reimplementing the signage program.



Enhance pedestrian systems and connections.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Parks and open spaces help establish a network that relates to both the built environment and the pedestrian systems that connect them. Public open spaces also serve a wide range of downtown users and should provide a diverse range of venues for activities, events and recreation. The downtown needs more of such park space in order to attract new residential and commercial uses.

Parks and open space enhancements to be made include:

- Expanding active and passive parks and plazas in the downtown core.
- Providing additional space for events and festivals.
- Establishing an integrated parks system by linking them with clearly marked pedestrian trails.



Expand active and passive parks and link them with clearly marked pedestrian trails.

AUTOMOBILE SYSTEMS

The character of the streets downtown greatly influences the type of development that will occur and therefore they should be planned to help create distinct neighborhoods and not be perceived as thoroughfares. That is, street designs should focus on improving access into the core, not through it. Buildings and streetscapes should help frame the street and make it inviting to pedestrians.

Automobile system enhancements should include:

- Basing street improvements on up-to-date data and coordinated planning.
- Avoiding widening any streets in the downtown. Instead, consider reducing street sections by widening sidewalks, adding parking or bicycle lanes.
- Providing a coordinated sign system to direct traffic efficiently.



Buildings and streetscapes should help frame the street and make it inviting to pedestrians.

PARKING SYSTEMS

The City and County should coordinate a system of parking structures and surface lots within downtown and manage them in an aggressive fashion to promote high utilization rates. Parking coordination and management is a major public investment strategy that could set the stage for private investment. This includes physical improvements, in the parking facilities themselves, enhanced pedestrian connections to them, and ongoing marketing and promotions. Additional public parking facilities should be planned in conjunction with key development projects as well. Existing downtown facilities such as churches could also be targeted for inclusion in a parking district as they are prime candidates for shared parking.

While new parking structures are suggested as a part of this plan, there are a few basic principles to keep in mind. First, the city and county should actively manage current parking resources. Second, a clear understanding is needed of who the users are and of their needs. The actual demand for additional parking may be less than expected.

Parking system enhancements should include:

- Enhancing streetscape connections to and enhancing landscapes in existing parking facilities.
- Instituting a parking district to effectively manage parking resources.
- Installing appropriate signage to direct autos to parking and pedestrians to their destinations.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Historic buildings are a major part of what makes downtown a unique destination. In fact, this genuine heritage is often what developers try to recreate in newer developments that compete with downtown. Strengthening the role that these important buildings play is a fundamental part of the basic framework strategy.

The historic courthouse located in the heart of downtown is a special asset to the community, and its preservation is critical. Williamson County should continue to rehabilitate it and promote its significance through guided tours. Private rehabilitation efforts should also be continued. Owners are encouraged to follow city, state and federal guidelines in order to be eligible for incentives.

Existing building codes can have measurable impact on rehabilitation projects. When extensive rehabilitation work is planned for an older building, it may trigger code compliance actions that may increase costs and/or significantly alter the historic character of the building. Inroads have been made by city agencies around the country that address this issue. Many cities have adopted *Guidelines for the Rehabilitation of Existing Buildings*, formerly the *Uniform Code for Building Conservation* (UCBC). This document contains guidelines for preserving existing buildings while achieving appropriate levels of safety. It discusses repairs and alterations, change of occupancy, enforcement and permits, historic buildings, life-safety requirements for existing high-rise buildings, accessibility, energy conservation, and more. It may be adopted as a code or used as a guideline.

Historic resource enhancements should include:

- Develop a heritage tourism program.
- Provide grants and loans for the rehabilitation of historic resources.
- Study the benefits of offering tax rebates for appropriate rehabilitation of historic buildings.
- Install interpretive markers throughout the downtown.
- Make use of special historic building code provisions that are available.
- Study the benefits of rehabilitating historic buildings/homes in all overlay districts, which could directly benefit downtown.

DESIGN CHARACTER

Overall, buildings throughout downtown should have a sense of “relatedness” in their design character, while at the same time allowing room to express individual variations in details and styles. Within the historic district, buildings should more closely relate to the older traditional buildings. Outside the historic district, buildings should relate at a basic level, in terms of building to the street edge, being of a human scale and creating a pedestrian-friendly context, as stipulated in the *Downtown and Old Town Design Guidelines*.

ACTIVITY CENTER CONCEPT

One special concept is to organize development around a series of activity centers. Much like the “anchors of activity” shown on the Framework Map, this concept serves to draw people outside of the downtown core and into the rest of downtown. Providing community focal points for development will strengthen the overall civic, cultural and business environment in downtown, and will also provide “mini-destinations” that help to reduce the scale of downtown. The courthouse square should continue to serve as the primary activity center, or a central anchor for wayfinding and community activities.

Each activity center should include uses that will attract people to downtown and encourage pedestrian activity. They also should include opportunities for outdoor spaces where people can gather.

The Activity Centers should be:

- 1. El Monumento Cafe**
- 2. Historic Williamson County Jail Re-use**
- 3. Monument Café/Tamiro Plaza/New Development**
- 4. Justice Center**
- 6. New Municipal Center/Festival Street**
- 6. New Mixed Use Development at 10th and Austin**
- 7. New Gateway Activity at University and Austin**
- 8. New Public Parking Structure with Retail Wrap**
- 9. Neighborhood Church & Event Center**

EL MONUMENTO CAFE

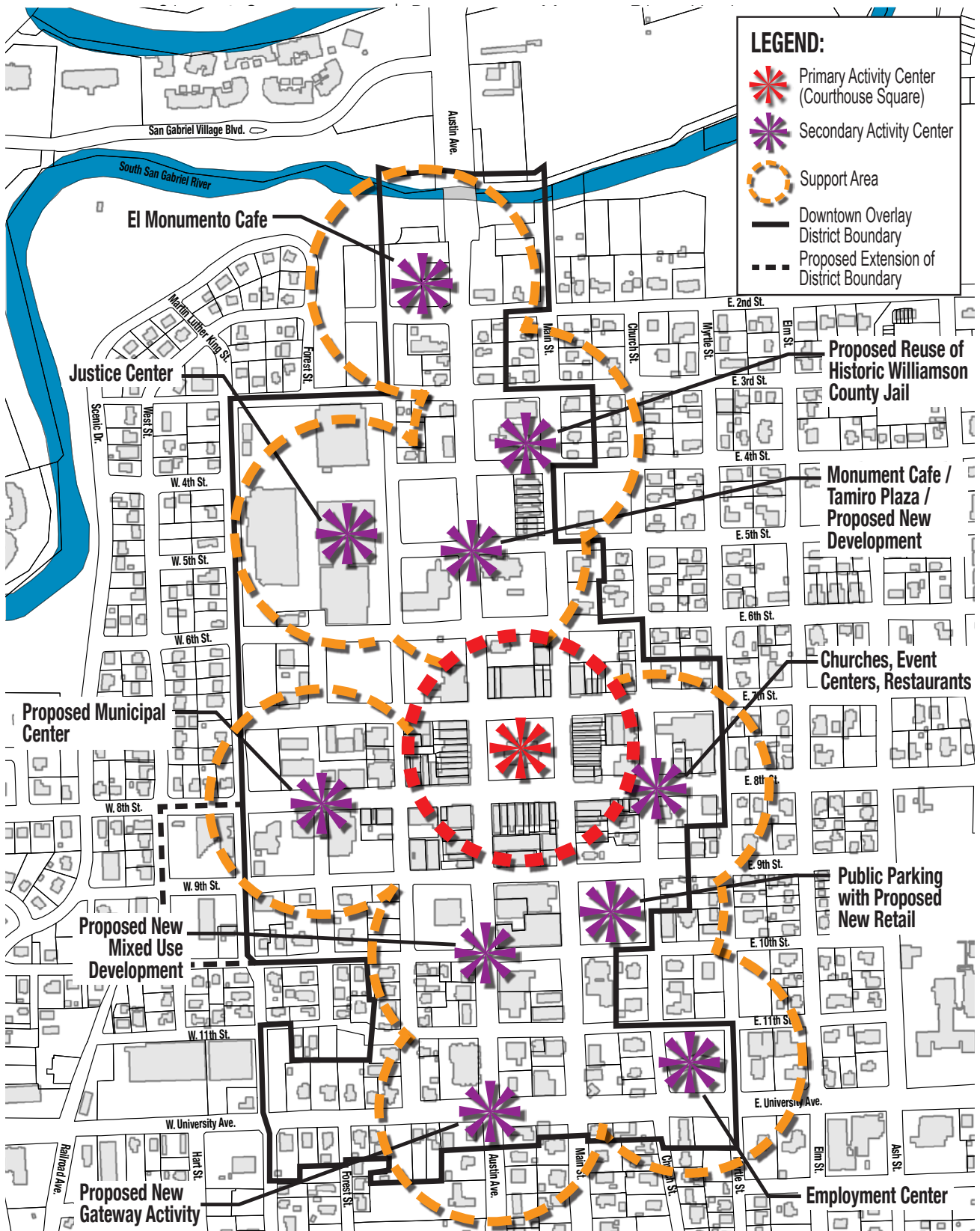
This city icon already acts as an activity center in its own right. Improved trail connections to the river trails and pedestrian connections along Austin Avenue will further activate this area. New modest liner buildings could be built along Austin Avenue on this property to help frame and activate the street.



El Monumento terrace helps establish an activity center focused on the river.

PROPOSED REUSE OF HISTORIC WILLIAMSON COUNTY JAIL

The block containing the historic Williamson County Jail, built in 1888, offers an opportunity to build on the heritage tourism strategy. Re-purposing the old jail at 4th and Main Streets was a very popular idea proposed by community residents. Some ideas for reusing the jail consist of a Bed and Breakfast, Art Gallery, Museum or Visitor’s Center. The addition to the jail should be demolished to re-enact the original setting, and a park-like setting should surround the jail.



MAP 7 | ACTIVITY CENTERS

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The historic jail is envisioned as redeveloping into a bed and breakfast, art gallery, museum or similar use to benefit the public and activate this area of downtown.

MONUMENT CAFÉ/TAMIRO PLAZA/ PROPOSED NEW DEVELOPMENT

Indicated as one of the major activity centers in the Framework Strategy, this intersection at 5th and Austin already includes increased activity due to Monument Café and Tamiro Plaza. New mixed-use development on the northern corners of the intersection should further activate this area.



The Monument Cafe and Tamiro Plaza have added a new level of energy north of the square. New development north of the 5th & Austin intersection will help further activate this area.

JUSTICE CENTER

The Justice Center acts as a civic activity and employment center. It is important to locate commercial uses that serve Justice Center employees to help enliven this area with daytime activity.



The new jail and justice center acts as a civic activity and employment center.

PROPOSED MUNICIPAL CENTER AND FESTIVAL STREET

This site is also proposed as a major activity center in the Framework Strategy. It lies between Rock Street and Martin Luther King, and is centered along 8th Street. The existing civic icon is the central library. In the long term, this area should develop as a campus for city offices. The street would be designed as a flexible space, to be closed for festivals and markets, to complement activities around the courthouse square. A few build-out scenarios are proposed in Chapter 8.



The old police station is envisioned as becoming part of a new municipal center centered around 8th Street, which will be a flexible-use festival street for special events.

PROPOSED NEW MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT AT 10TH AND AUSTIN

Another major activity center as proposed in the Framework Strategy is the intersection of 10th & Austin. This area has potential to redevelop into more urban buildings of 2 to 4 stories that frame Austin Avenue and extend the character of the courthouse square south.

PROPOSED NEW GATEWAY ACTIVITY AT UNIVERSITY AND AUSTIN

This area is well suited for commercial development because of the high traffic this intersection experiences. Primarily, the street edge should be defined by a storefront wall along Austin and University. A small entry plaza/park or expanded pedestrian zone would be included at the corner(s). This site should also include an important visual link to help guide visitors towards the downtown. The building use is not as important as the provision for landscaping and directional signage. The new retail center at the northwest corner of the intersection is a good example of development orienting to the street.



The new retail center at the northwest corner of the intersection is a good example of how new development should orient to the street.

PUBLIC PARKING WITH PROPOSED NEW RETAIL

The southeastern block of 9th and Main includes a public parking lot. The long-term vision for this block would be to redevelop into a public parking structure that is wrapped with a retail component to activate Main Street.

CHURCHES, EVENT CENTERS, RESTAURANTS

This area is designated as the major eastern development anchor in the Framework Strategy. The churches that are clustered in this area form an anchor for the eastern edge of the downtown and the new Union on 8th Event Center will help enliven this area with small local events. The Grace Heritage Center, redevelopment of City Hall (once offices relocate) and new restaurants also add to the vibrancy of this area. These uses would be enhanced with extension of sidewalks, redesign of some on-street parking and perhaps development of a small park. These facilities have some open space associated with them, which should be preserved to the extent feasible.



The existing parking lot at 9th and Main Streets should redevelop into a public parking structure with a “wrap” of retail uses fronting Main Street.