

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The framework for downtown is composed of a set of Character Areas which focus on concentrations of selected uses and special features. These character areas are described in this chapter. The descriptions assume development that complies with the Unified Development Code and that is consistent with the land uses designated in the City's Century Plan. Focusing development into these character areas will help establish a "critical mass" of certain uses. Other types of development that are in compliance with city zoning regulations can certainly occur within each of these areas, but ideally the emphasis should be on those highlighted as part of the preferred development character. The Character Areas reflect the future, or anticipated, uses of these blocks, not necessarily what is currently experienced there. Also note that even where a preferred use is recommended in this plan, all uses permitted under the City's relevant zoning and planning regulations would continue to be available options.

Character Areas

The Character Areas are:

1. Downtown Core — The retail, dining and entertainment destination of Georgetown.
2. Government Center — The civic spine for the community.
3. Downtown North — A mixed-use area with housing, offices and other retail venues.
4. Downtown South — A mixed-use area with housing, offices and other retail venues.
5. University Avenue — The entrance into downtown for many, this corridor is intended to continue to serve residents with community services.

Downtown Core Character Area

While the success of the block faces immediately surrounding the historic courthouse is evident, expanding this area into more of the surrounding blocks will strengthen downtown’s role as a regional shopping center. Specialty retail, dining and entertainment venues are needed that position this retail core as an exciting place distinct from regional suburban malls. A fifteen-block area surrounding the historic courthouse is termed the “Downtown Core” in this plan. (The Downtown Core Character Area is identified on Map #6 on page 54 as the red block numbered ①.)

Key Features of the Downtown Core

This area retains the best definition of a retail-oriented street edge surrounding the Town Square Historic District. It has a collection of historic buildings that provide interest and is served by on-street parking, for the most part. The existing streetscape amenities consist of brick pavers, benches, decorative lights and period street signs.

Development Recommendations

This area should be the specialty shopping and dining destination for the county; it should be entertaining and highlight the unique qualities of a downtown shopping experience. It should include shops, restaurants and specialty stores. Office space and apartments on upper floors should be promoted that will help energize this area and support the street level businesses. Existing historic assets should be preserved whenever feasible, and be adapted to a new use.

Recommended Projects in the Downtown Core Character Area

- Promote individual retail store rehabilitations.
- Facilitate adaptive reuse of historic buildings and redevelopment of vacant lots.
- Continue outdoor activities, including the Farmers Market, Poppy Festival, Christmas Stroll, Market Days, First Fridays and Lunch Concerts.
- Stage small outdoor arts venues.
- Continue to promote dining and specialty retail businesses.
- Promote development of downtown living and professional offices on upper floors.
- Promote development of more cultural facilities and entertainment venues.

Government Center Character Area

Three government centers have emerged in the history of downtown’s development. One is around the historic Williamson County Courthouse. A second is comprised of the various city offices, police department and fire department, scattered throughout the downtown area. The last is the Williamson County Justice Center located to the northwest of the downtown core. Map #2, *Major Downtown Property Owners*, on page 16 illustrates this current distribution of governmental office space. (The Government Center Character Area is identified on Map #6 on page 54 as the blue block numbered ②.)

Recently the City relocated some of its office space to areas outside of the downtown area. This decentralization of space weakens the role of downtown as the government center. In time, those offices that are oriented to serving the public should return to downtown.

Key Features of the Government Center Character Area

The area defined as the Government Center currently is home to the police department, the public library a number of law office buildings and support services. There are also a number of large vacant lots that are used for parking. These facilities form the basis of a potential City government center. This area is prime for redevelopment.

Development Recommendations

These functions should be consolidated into a single Government Center anchoring the western edge of downtown. A series of new buildings housing the various city departments south of the current County Justice Center would provide a stable downtown presence. (*See also Chapter 8 for more detail.*)

Recommended Projects in the Government Center Character Area

- New City Hall (potentially phased)
- New public plaza, festival street and park
- New public parking structure
- New public library
- Incubator space for start-up businesses

Actions for the Government Center Character Area

- Develop a facility master plan for the city government, which outlines the projected space needs for all departments.
- Develop a business incubator and parking structure.
- Incorporate findings from the library planning study.

Downtown North Character Area

The neighborhood north of the downtown core along Austin Avenue and Main Street is positioned to orient development towards the South San Gabriel River. Doing so will help bring the river into the downtown environment as an actively used amenity. (The Downtown North Character Area is identified on Map #6 on the following page as the tan blocks numbered ③.)

Key Features of the Downtown North Character Area

These blocks contain residential structures that have been converted to commercial uses. Others are still residences. The historic Williamson County Jail also is located in the Downtown North Character Area.

Special development opportunities exist at the northern end of the planning area, where the historic bridge crosses the South San Gabriel River. The historic bridge contributes to the character of the nearby downtown historic district and helps to interpret the evolution of the city.

There is an opportunity to provide a stronger pedestrian connection to the river at this point. A stair leading to the trail below and an overlook here should be considered, to provide a direct connection to the downtown from the river trail. This would be an amenity that would aid in the marketing of development along Austin Avenue, and would be especially appealing to visitors. This also could include interpretive markers, which would be a key element in a heritage tourism program.

Development opportunities also exist to provide mixed use projects that overlook the river here. Pedestrian system improvements should occur along with such development to link it to the downtown core.

Development Recommendations

This area is envisioned as a new “urban village,” where a mix of multifamily infill housing should be promoted. Office space and restaurants are also encouraged for this area.

Recommended Projects in the Downtown North Character Area

- Retail along Austin Avenue
- Conference center
- Hotel
- Restaurants
- Multifamily housing
- Law and professional offices
- Neighborhood-based services, including day care
- Neighborhood parks

Downtown South Character Area

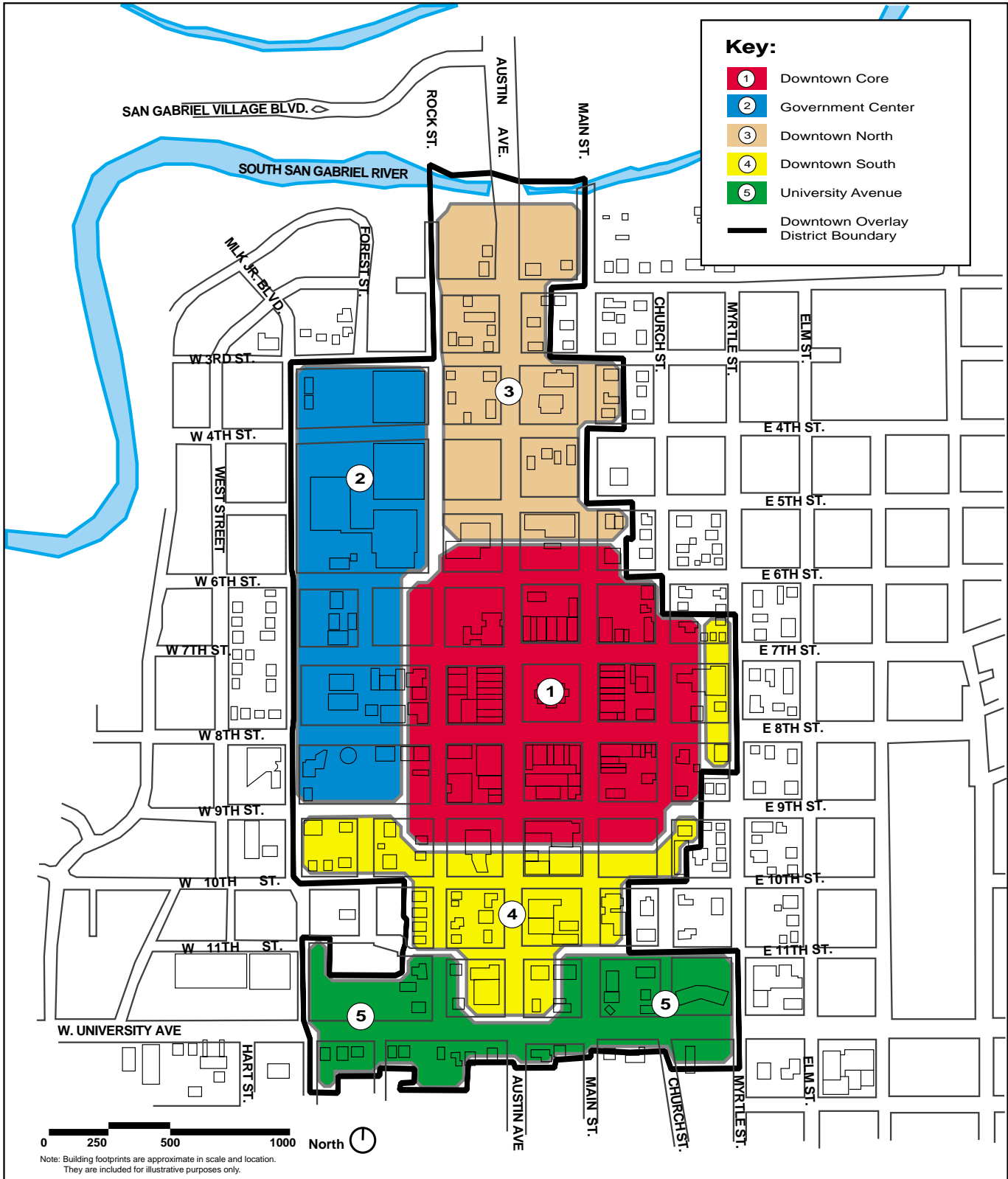
The area south of the downtown core along Austin Avenue and Main Street is an important “service” area for the primary retail and entertainment focus of the Downtown Core. (The Downtown South Character Area is identified on Map #6 on the following page as the yellow blocks numbered ④.) Today, it has many buildings that have a strip commercial character, but the future should be more urban, with buildings constructed to the street edge and continuous sidewalks accommodating pedestrian activity.

Key Features of Downtown South

These blocks are a mix of traditional commercial storefront architecture, transitional business uses and one-time residences that have been converted to commercial uses. Some of these houses are still primary residences for some.

Development Recommendations

Commercial uses that support the surrounding residential neighborhoods are encouraged in this area. A mix of retail and office space should be provided. New buildings that are located at the street edge with parking to the rear are preferred. The eastern portion, between 6th and 9th Streets, should continue to serve as a transition to the neighborhood.



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Georgetown, Texas
Georgetown Downtown Master Plan
Development Character Areas

Map #6

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Recommended Projects in the Downtown South Character Area

- Retail along Austin Avenue
- Restaurants
- Multifamily housing
- Law and professional offices
- Neighborhood-based services, including day care
- Neighborhood parks

University Avenue Character Area

Outside the downtown boundary, a section of West University Avenue that extends from the interstate east toward the downtown is currently an auto-oriented commercial strip. It is a major point of access into the downtown and the historic Old Town neighborhood. It does not provide, however, a strong image for the downtown experience. It is not pedestrian-friendly.

Within the downtown boundary, West University Avenue has a mix of older houses and some auto-oriented businesses. (The University Avenue Character Area is identified on Map #6 on the previous page as the green block numbered ⑤.)

Key Features of University Avenue

Originally, this portion of University Avenue was primarily residential, and some structures from that period remain. Many others are auto-oriented commercial buildings, usually set back from the street with parking in front.

Development Recommendations

Auto-oriented functions are expected to continue, but the corridor should redevelop as an attractive entry into the downtown and should include uses that form a compatible transition into adjacent residential neighborhoods. Businesses that can serve these neighborhoods, as well as the downtown as a whole, should be promoted. The pedestrian experience should be improved, and to the extent feasible, the residential character should be maintained, even as commercial uses occur.

Recommended Projects and Enhancements in the University Avenue Character Area

- Extend landscaping along the corridor.
- Promote mixed-use developments.
- Discourage multiple curb cuts on a site.

- Encourage buildings to be placed at the street or sidewalk edge with parking located to the rear.
- Minimize the visual impacts of site lighting and highway-oriented signs.
- Increase the amount of landscaping and screening within a site.

Finally, it is important that development in these Character Areas be compatible with the vision established in the *Design Guidelines for the Downtown Overlay District*. For this reason, those guidelines should be rigorously applied.

Downtown as a Cultural Center

Historically, downtown was the cultural center for the community. In more recent years, however, some of these functions have located to outlying areas. Downtown still retains some important cultural assets, including the renovated Palace Theater, the Williamson County Historical Museum, Grace Heritage Center, the Shotgun House Living History Museum, the Georgetown Firefighters Museum and the Library. These should form the core of an expanded cultural center, or arts district.

Therefore, other cultural facilities should be developed. This includes another performance space, music venues, a visual art gallery and private art galleries. While these may be distributed throughout the downtown, locating some of these facilities along the eastern portion should be considered. This would help to anchor this side with uses that are compatible with the residential neighborhoods that abut downtown. A special opportunity would be to convert the old post office (now city administrative offices) to a visual arts museum when city office relocate into a new civic center on the west side of the square.

Designation of downtown as an arts district would be a key economic development strategy that would make use of the special character of the area and would reinforce the pedestrian-oriented character of the area. It would also be compatible with the specialty retail uses that are to be en-

couraged. In establishing an arts district, downtown would be promoted as a center of cultural venues. (No special land use changes are needed because the new code accommodates arts uses.)

Actions:

- As an initial step, a facility plan for an arts center should be developed.
- In addition, special recruitment programs should target galleries as potential tenants for downtown spaces.