

# OPPORTUNITY SITES

The downtown plan includes suggestions for redevelopment of some key parcels that are envisioned as key anchors. These include components of the activity centers proposed in Chapter 2 and also are referenced in the discussions of character areas in Chapter 3. In this chapter, some of those opportunity sites are examined in more detail. Illustrative plans demonstrate the potential that these properties have to set the tone for a reinvigorated city center. It should be noted, however, that other development scenarios are certainly possible, and that none of the concepts presented here are formal proposals for development. The sites studied are identified on Map #12 on the following page.

## **Draeger Property Opportunity Site**

A key development opportunity exists in the Draeger automobile dealership property. This consists of five city blocks just north of the courthouse square.

### ***Basic Objectives***

Any development on these blocks should be knit into the downtown and should serve to extend the pedestrian-oriented core. Any development along Austin Avenue and Sixth Street should have retail activity at the sidewalk edge, to encourage walking and extend the pedestrian zone for the core.

Advantages of the Austin Avenue block are:

- Good automobile access
- Assembly of a large parcel would be easy
- The possibility exists to close 5th Street, between Austin Avenue and Rock Street, if needed.

Issues related to the Austin Avenue blocks are:

- High traffic volumes impede pedestrian flow between blocks
- Institutional use on the western edge limits the ability to stimulate nearby redevelopment for retail
- Residential neighborhood along the eastern side is a sensitive edge

### **Automobile Access**

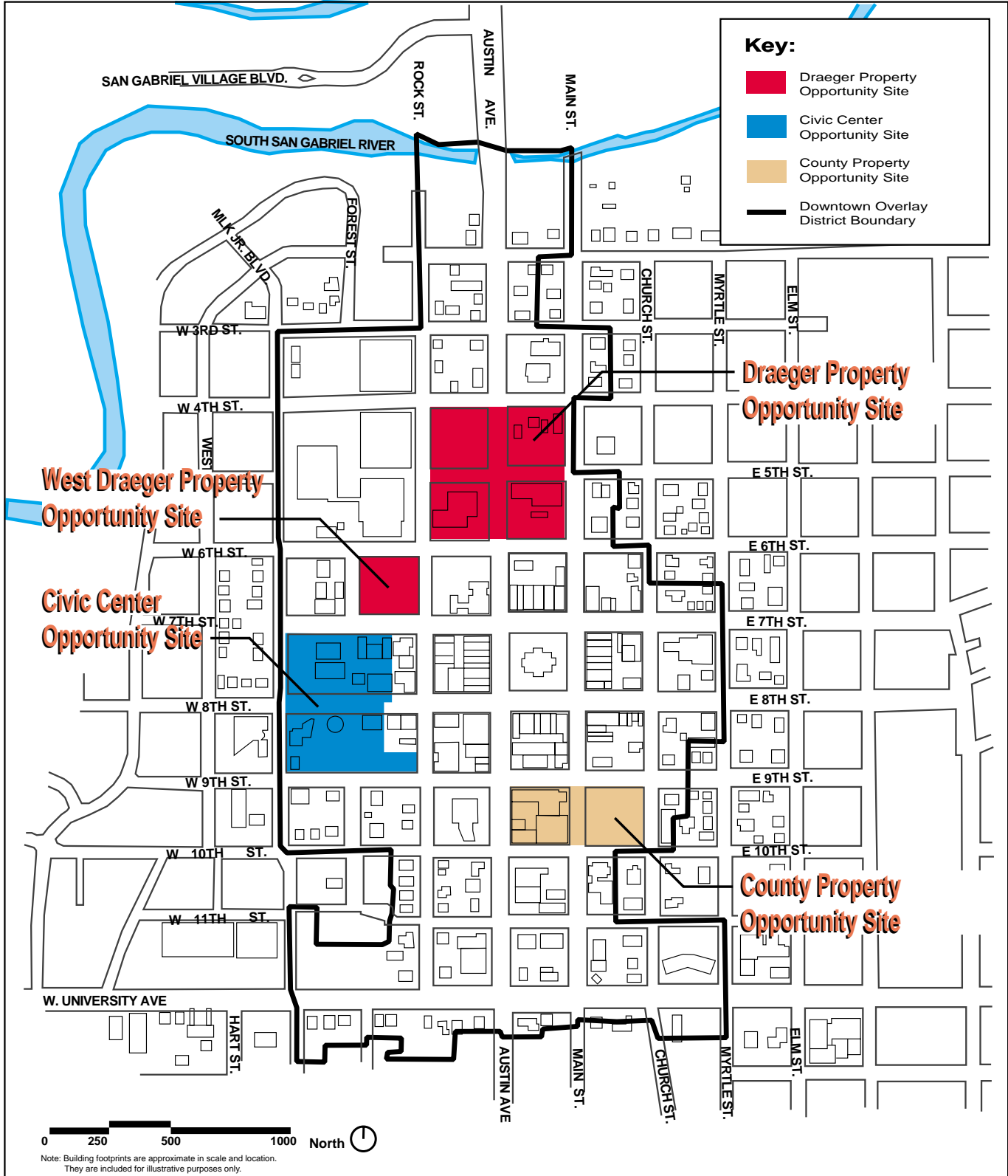
Austin Avenue provides good automobile access through the center of the four major blocks. On the other hand, because Austin Avenue has high traffic volumes and relatively high traffic speeds, it effectively divides the set of blocks into two halves. Pedestrian connections across Austin are weak. They could be enhanced with improved crosswalks and preferential treatment for pedestrian crossings at intersections, but this remains a consideration for any development concept.

Another concern is that potential proposals by TXDOT could expand the street for cars and degrade its appeal for pedestrian activity. This is a liability in terms of developing these sites either for retail or civic functions. (An alternative to the TXDOT design approach should be explored which calms traffic and enhances the environment for pedestrians and is discussed in Chapter 5.)

### **Edges to Abutting Blocks**

Each of these blocks abuts other uses. Those on the east side of Austin Avenue look onto established residential neighborhoods, while those on the west back onto the new county Justice Center complex.

The county Justice Center frames the western edge of the Draeger properties, on Rock Street. Some pedestrian activity occurs here, and may increase as the county parking structure comes into increased use by downtown patrons. Nonetheless, this side is best suited for activities that



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**Map #12**

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do not require a street frontage, as retail would for example. However, this edge could work well as a service-oriented side for some development scenarios.

The eastern side of the property lies along Main Street and is flanked by established residential uses. Development here should be sensitive along this edge. Residential functions will be most appropriate, to serve as a transition into the residential context.

### **Pedestrian Connections to Amenities**

Connections to other amenities in the area should be provided. This includes:

- Access to the river trail and Blue Hole Park
- Pedestrian connections to courthouse square

### **Views**

Opportunities to maintain views to key assets should be planned with any development on these sites.

### **Retail Support**

Development in this area should help to stimulate retail activity downtown. It can do this by:

- Providing retail space along the street edges that abut the retail core
- Including other uses that bring customers to the area, such as residential, hotels and offices

### **Parking**

Any large parking areas on these sites should be planned such that they can help to serve the retail core as well. They should be located to the interior of parcels and also should be well landscaped.

## ***Alternative Development Scenarios***

With these basic planning principles in mind, two alternative scenarios are illustrated to demonstrate potential development that would be compatible with the objectives of this downtown plan. In these scenarios, the Draeger property is developed with mixed use, including retail at the street level and professional offices and residential above, which is termed “commercial.”

### **Scenario A – Mixed Use Development**

These blocks are well suited for such development. This would serve to extend the retail core/pedestrian walking area, and begin to extend activity toward the north, to the river. See illustrative plan on page 92.

In this approach, the Austin Avenue street sides would be developed with retail storefronts. Parking would be located in the interior of each block. Residential uses would be located on Main Street. A small park is also provided as an amenity for these residences. A hotel could be included as well and some of the townhouses could be part of an “extended stay” component of the hotel. Some of the commercial space in this development could be created as a business incubator as well.

Each block could be developed independently, but ideally a master plan would coordinate them, such that pedestrian connections, plazas and outdoor dining areas work together.

### **Key Features:**

- 5<sup>th</sup> Street is extensively landscaped, serving as an east-west pedestrian way and access to on-site parking
- Buildings frame the perimeter of the properties.
- An entry plaza faces to the courthouse, providing views to the courthouse square.
- Along Austin Avenue and 6th Street, retail is located at the ground level, with offices above.

### **Scenario B – Mixed Use with Hotel and Conference Center**

In a second alternative scenario, the focus of development is around a Conference Center. The need for a conference center has been mentioned, although a formal market study remains as a needed action item. This concept is presented in the illustrative plan on page 93.

In terms of locating a conference center, the site has good vehicular access, although it is not immediately accessible from the interstate highway and it does not have a nearby hotel, which is generally considered necessary.

A hotel would be constructed adjacent to the conference center and would share an automobile drop-off court with it. In this location, conventioners could use the county parking structure. Service areas would be along the western edge, abutting the county building.

The blocks east of Austin Avenue would develop as mixed-use, similar to that envisioned in Scenario A. Parking would be located in the interior of the block. Small plazas and courtyards would be amenities for offices and restaurants.

**Key Features:**

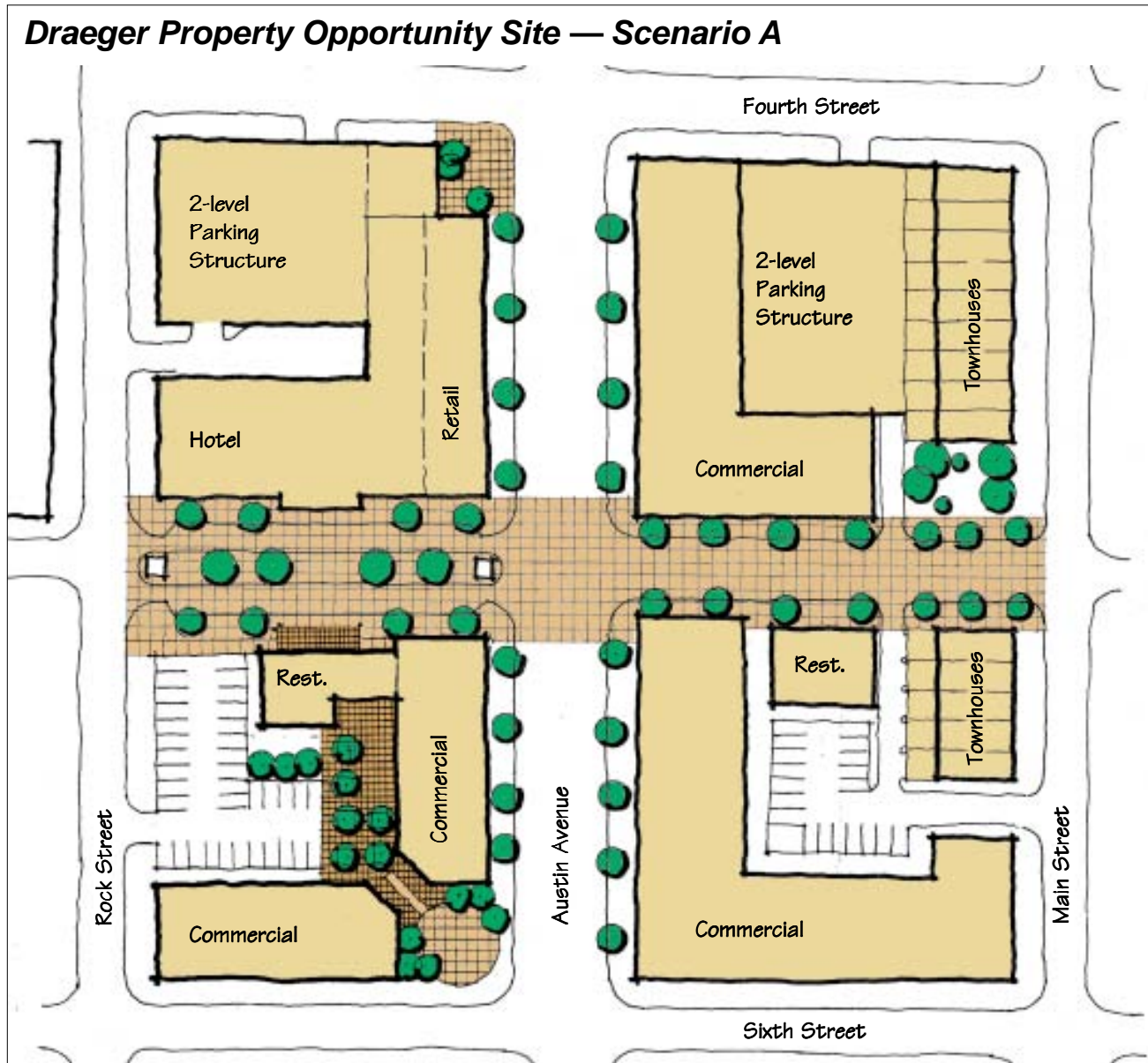
- 5<sup>th</sup> Street serves as an auto-court between the hotel and conference center; sculptures and

fountains provide reference points along this street.

- The conference center orients to the courthouse with an entry plaza.
- The conference center also orients to an auto court shared with the hotel.
- Townhouses frame the eastern edge along Main Street.

**Coordinating Development on the Draeger Properties**

In any case, the ability to plan these blocks together is an important advantage. If the properties can be acquired as a single holding, then this coordinated redevelopment can occur. Otherwise,

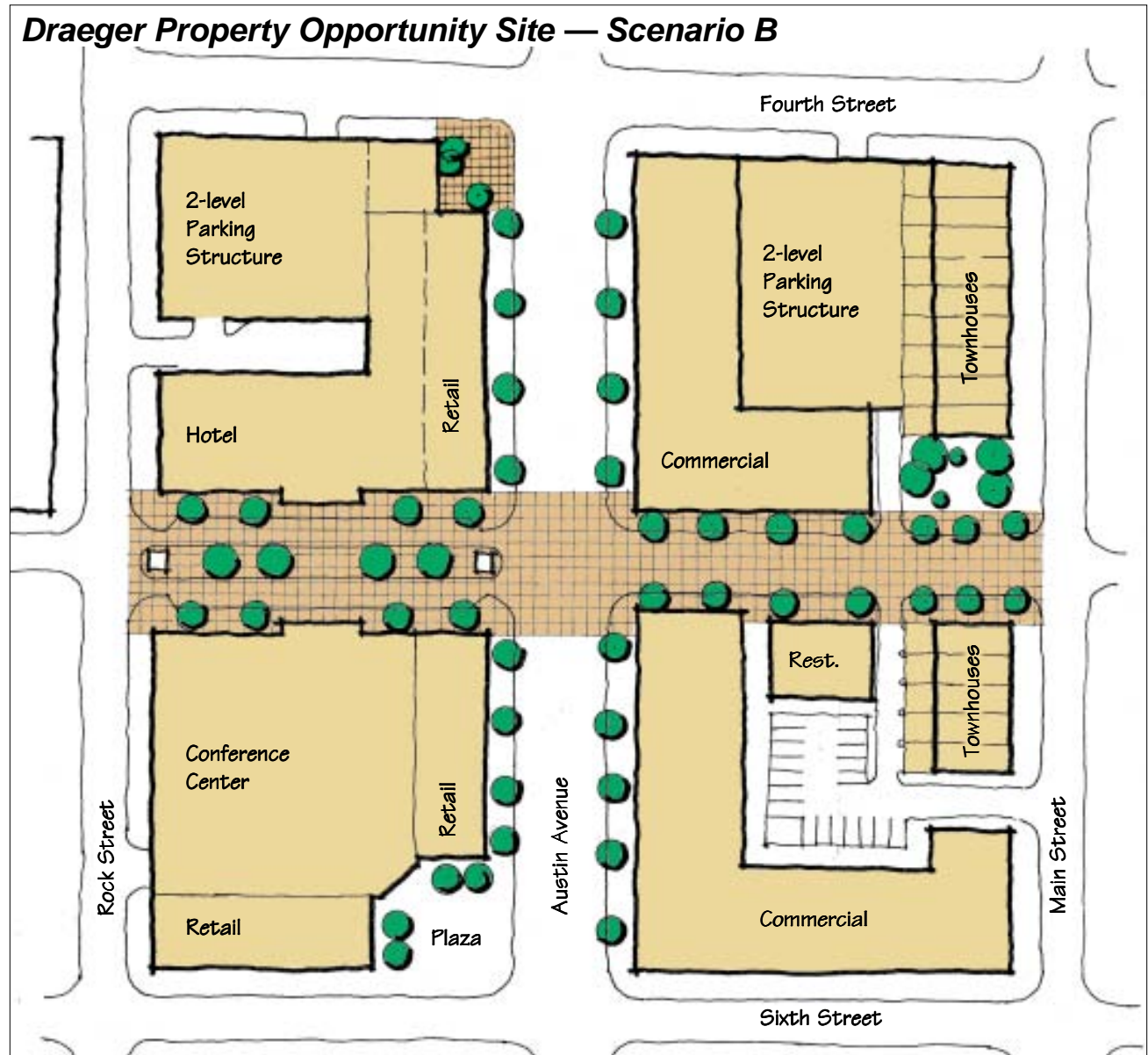


more piecemeal development may happen. Even though this could still fit with downtown goals and would be designed to comply with the Design Guidelines, the synergistic opportunities to reinforce development could be missed. Therefore, if acquisition can be achieved in a reasonable way, it should be pursued.

This is essentially a redevelopment role that the city would be playing. It could master plan the site and then offer it for redevelopment, as appropriate to specific plans, and could, if necessary assist with financing or with other incentives. In order to take on this role, however, it is essential that the ultimate development be one that comple-

ments the retail core and extends the activity of the pedestrian zone, while respecting adjacent neighborhoods. It also could stimulate other mixed-use development to the north along Austin Avenue to the river.

Block 36 - The fifth block, Block 36, does not have exposure to Austin Avenue. It also is somewhat isolated from other retail oriented streets. Perhaps the best scenario here would be to develop the block with professional offices, primarily targeted toward attorneys and other professionals that would benefit from being close to the Justice Center. Some service retail would be located along the street edge as well.



## Civic Center Opportunity Site

The Civic Center opportunity site lies along West 8<sup>th</sup> Street and is framed by Rock Street on the east and Martin Luther King Boulevard on the west. It is envisioned as a new civic center for city government and related services.

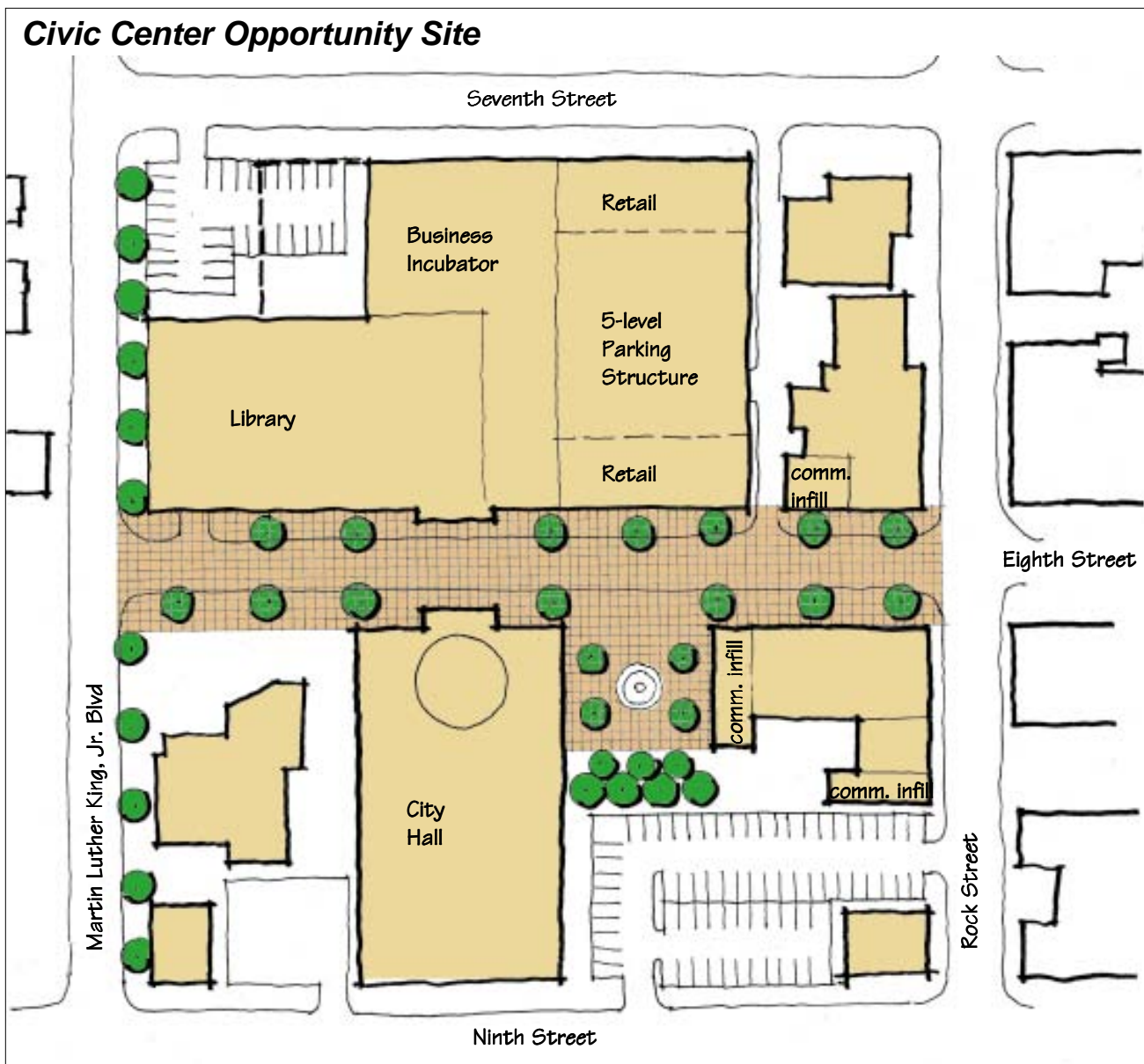
### Basic Objectives

- To provide a centralized location for city government offices such that services are convenient to patrons.

- To create a focus of activity for the western edge of the downtown.
- To create additional outdoor space for general public use as well as for special events.
- To support job creation and economic development programs in the downtown

### Alternative Development Scenarios

The focus of this development would be a new city hall. This would accommodate key administrative and service functions in one central location. Ideally, offices that are presently distributed downtown as well as in outlying areas would relocate there, although some could remain in satellite locations that are within walking distance. (City



Council Chambers, for example, could remain where they are located, although in time that site is likely to be desirable for other functions that would help to animate the courthouse square. In the future, for example, this might be a prime performance venue.) In addition, the existing police station building, which is a historic resource, would be retained.

The Civic Center also would include a parking structure, which would serve government facilities as well as businesses in the part of downtown. Supplementary surface parking would be located to the south and east of the proposed city hall.

A new library also would be developed. This would include a grand entry facing onto 8<sup>th</sup> Street and conveniently accessible from the parking structure. (The existing library could be adapted for other governmental offices or as an arts facility.)

A key element would be construction of a business incubator facility which would provide state-of-the-art telecommunications service and would

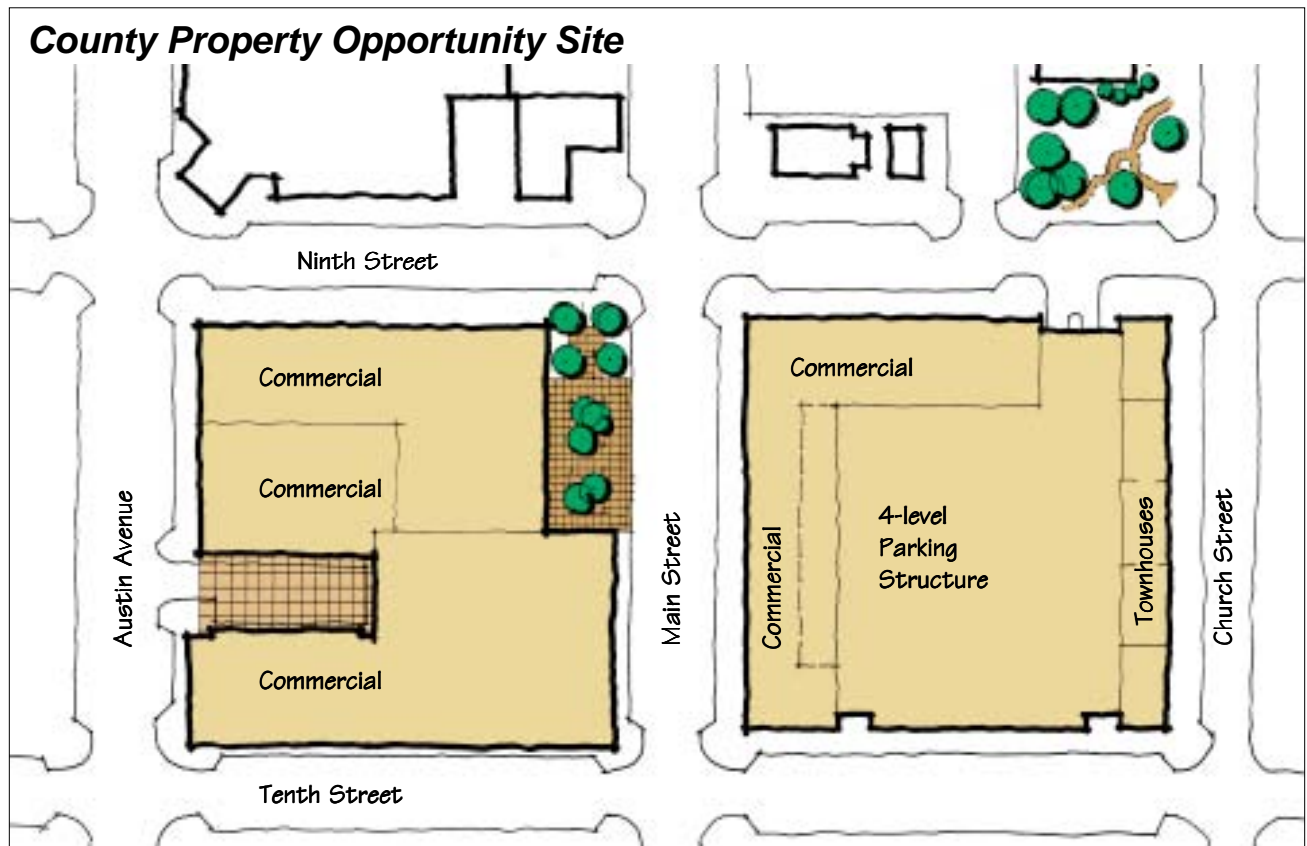
have floor plates of a size that would accommodate businesses in early stages of expansion.

At the heart of the center is a “festival street.” Eighth Street would be renovated with decorative paving and extensive landscaping. It would be designed such that portions could be closed for street fairs, markets and concerts. (Access to the parking structure would still be maintained.) A park would abut the street on the southern edge.

**Phasing Potential**

This project is one that would be phased, particularly because some of the components would require special funding, perhaps through bond issues, and because more detailed facilities needs studies will be required prior to final programming of the project.

The proposed city hall building could itself be constructed in phases. The first half could be constructed relatively early in the process, helping to create an anchor facing 8<sup>th</sup> Street. A second portion could be added to the south at a later date.



## **County Property Opportunity Site**

The parcel termed the “County Property” is a portion of the former Hewlett automobile dealership. The primary block lies between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> streets and is framed by Main Street on the west and Church Street on the east.

### ***Basic Objectives***

The basic objective is to develop the site with a mix of uses and provide a public parking facility to serve this portion of the downtown. Moderately increasing the intensity of development is also an objective.

### ***Development Scenario***

In this scenario, a parking structure is located in the interior of the block. This would include three to four levels, with perhaps one below grade. The height of the structure would be proportioned to remain compatible with the downtown and maintain key views. Approximately 374 cars would be accommodated.

A two-story commercial building would be constructed along the western edge. This would have retail on the street level, with offices above.

The Church Street edge would be lined with townhouses, which have entries facing the street. These would be two stories in height. Approximately five units could be provided.

It is also possible to include portions of the other former Hewlett block, which lies on the west side of Main Street, with the participation of the property owners.

### ***Phasing Potential***

While constructing this entire site at one time would be ideal, it is possible to phase the project. In an initial step, the entire property could be developed as a landscaped parking lot, for interim use. Then the mixed-use development could occur later.