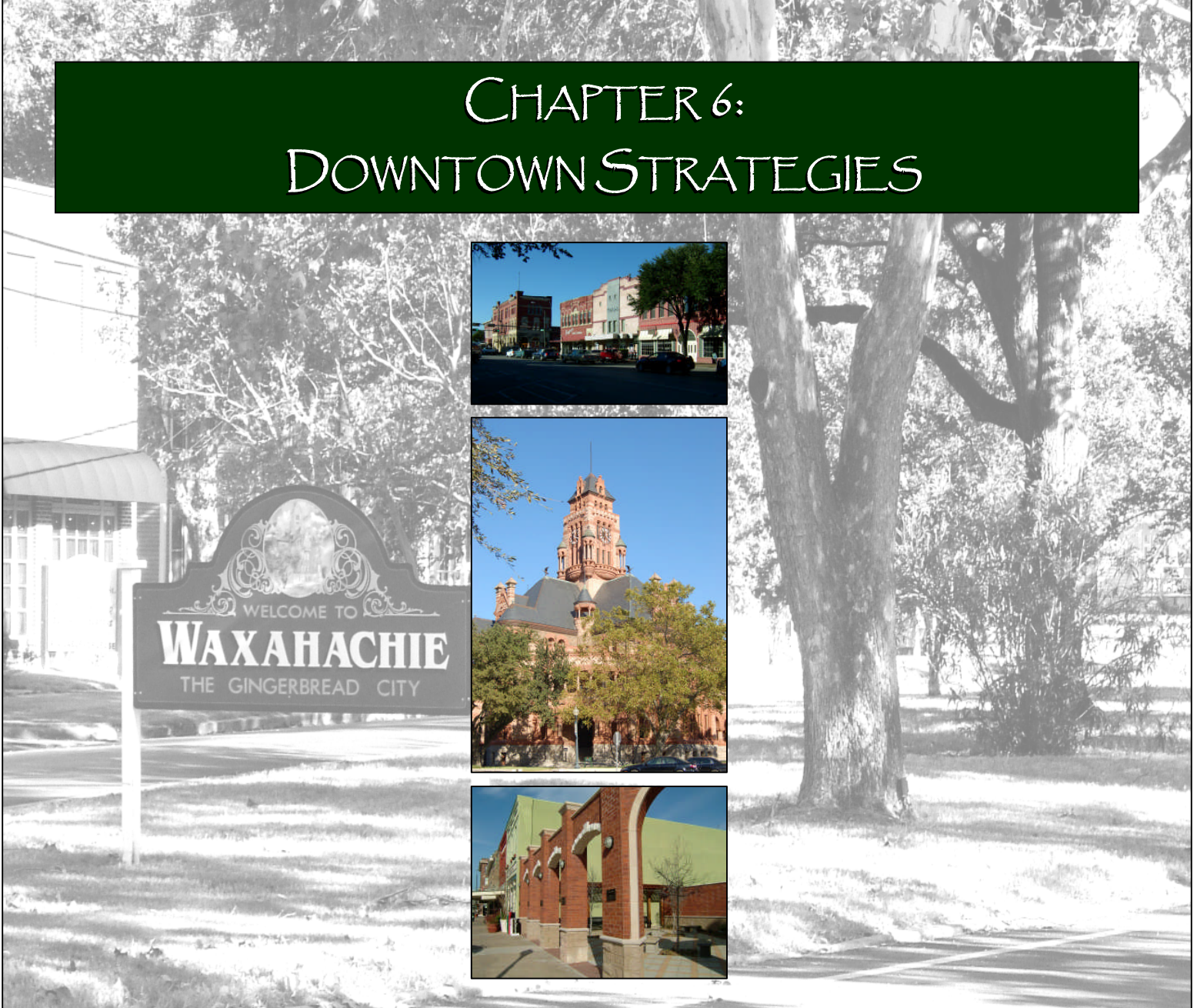


# City of Waxahachie 2007 Comprehensive Plan

## CHAPTER 6: DOWNTOWN STRATEGIES



The urban fabric is made up of lots of tiny things, including loft apartments in converted old warehouses, mixed-use retail and residential, artist studios, galleries, niche marketing, restored buildings, small boutiques, wide sidewalks, outdoor dining, eateries, pubs, live/work spaces, mom-and-pop businesses, churches, libraries, court houses, landmarks, lighting, public gathering places where people can connect, street furniture, storefront facade improvements, farmers' markets, theaters. Don't small things like these bring diversity, density, vitality, exuberance, vibrancy, connectedness, liveliness, and disorganized complexity to a downtown and thus reinforce the urban fabric?

*Adapted from Quote on the Urban Land Institute Website*





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# Background

The Concerned Citizens Coalition (or C<sup>3</sup>) Master Plan prepared in 2001, was a joint public-private funded plan which involved merchants, property owners and the general public. It was very broad and comprehensive, laying out an historical framework and context for the Downtown area. It also set out possible project opportunities.

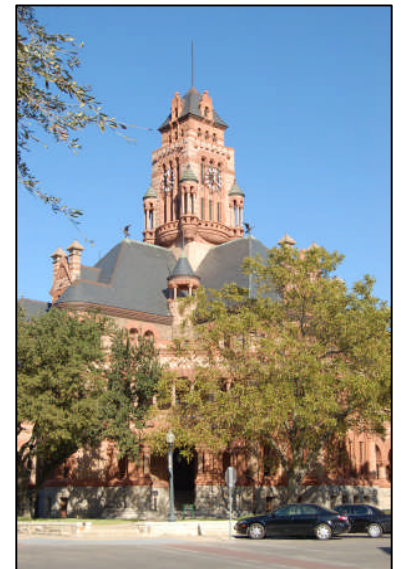
Much has been accomplished as a result of the Plan:

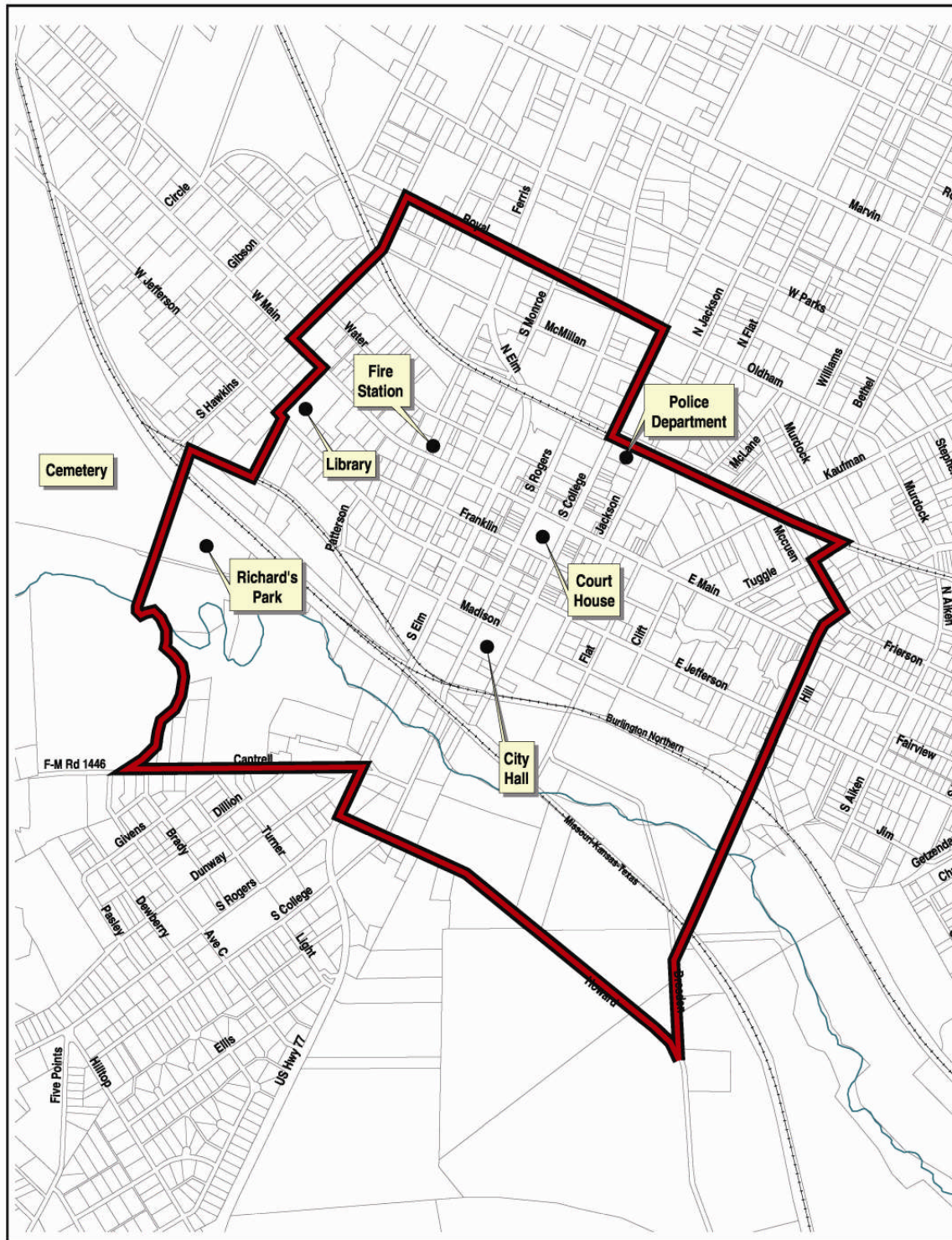
- ❖ A Historic Overlay was applied;
- ❖ A non-profit 501-C3 was created to facilitate redevelopment;
- ❖ A Tax Increment Financing District was created to capture a portion of increased property taxes due to rising property values and reinvest in the Downtown; and
- ❖ Several lofts have been constructed.



Building on the C<sup>3</sup> Plan, it is time to focus specific attention on refining Downtown development by:

- ❖ Enhancing its regional identity;
- ❖ Ensuring that the Downtown has a “genuine” or “real” feel;
- ❖ Developing a parking strategy that will support greater mixed use development;
- ❖ Connecting Downtown to surrounding neighborhoods to increase their desirability and value , and to support Downtown retailing;
- ❖ Creating and implementing streetscape and development standards that enhance the pedestrian experience year-round; and
- ❖ Preparing an implementation strategy that will ensure these objectives are met.





# Downtown Area

Plate 6-1







# New Downtown Strategies

## Identity

Downtown is the crown jewel of Waxahachie. It is an asset that is unparalleled in the north Texas region. It gives Waxahachie its identity, and is a major factor in attracting new residents and businesses to the area.

The best way to enhance this asset is to build on the historic characteristics of walkability, continuous street-front buildings, and a healthy mix of retail, restaurant, residential and business uses. It is important to establish Downtown as a real, sustainable Downtown with a full mix of uses and commerce; not just a destination for specialty antiques and decorations.

This goal of creating sustainable pedestrian environments is one which should be reflected throughout the City in its new and redeveloping retail districts. (Also see Chapter 3, the *Neighborhood Livability and Image Enhancement Plan*.)

## Creating a Sustainable Downtown

The Downtown should be infused with freedom and flexibility to allow it to grow and evolve by being the true cultural center of the City. It should be a magnet for retail, entertainment, dining, living and office-ing.

It will also include a "building infrastructure" that is capable of growth and change that will allow it to evolve into its own unique neighborhood and to accommodate changing market demand while maintaining its historic feel and pedestrian-oriented character.



A sustainable Downtown will have some of the following characteristics:

- ❖ Creates a "Sense of Place";
- ❖ Is pedestrian-oriented;
- ❖ Provides for access by a variety of modes of transportation – walking, bicycling, transit and vehicles;
- ❖ Contains a mixed of residential types and sizes that serves a person's housing needs over a lifetime;
- ❖ Attracts successive generations;
- ❖ Creates flexible commercial space; and,
- ❖ Is environmentally sensitive.

#### What is "Sense of Place?"

Places that are desirable appeal to all the senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. They are a rich mix of local activities, aesthetic design, quality, and price. Successful place making is about meeting demand from the local community. Besides allowing people to perform essential functions such as holding jobs and shopping, places should be enjoyable, entertaining, and educational. Success in place making lies in configuring spaces and structures and the interconnections between and among them in a way that facilitates and encourages human activity and interaction—an environment that people want to be a part of because it has been designed, built, and maintained with the goal of satisfying the full spectrum of human needs and aspirations from the mundane to the inspirational. A successful place appeals to the senses, engaging visitors and inhabitants alike in a voyage of discovery of enticing sights, sounds, and scents.

*Booth, Geoffrey, et al. Ten Principles for Reinventing Suburban Business Districts. Washington, D.C.: ULI—the Urban Land Institute, 2002.*

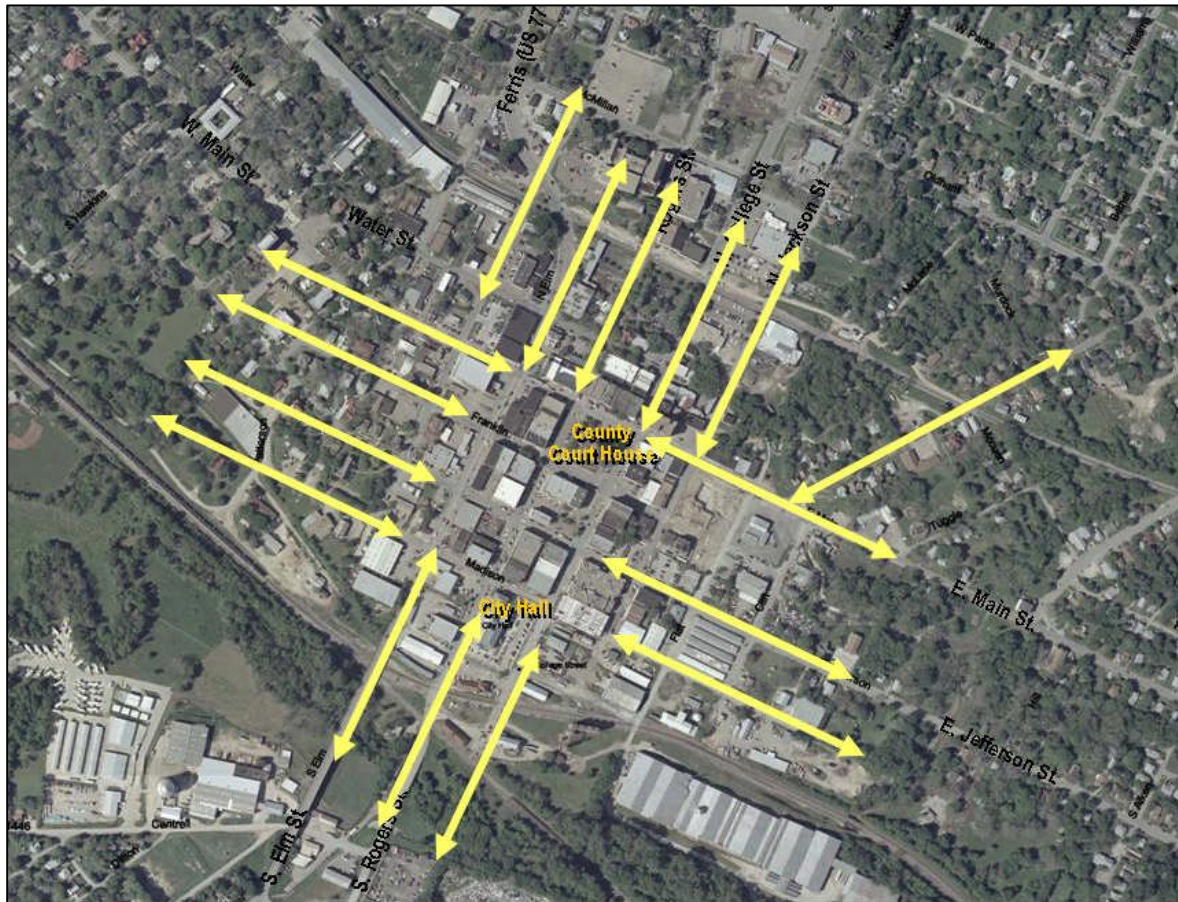
## Connect to Surrounding Neighborhoods

Creating attractive pedestrian connections to surrounding neighborhoods will increase the desirability and value of those neighborhoods while at the same time supporting business activity in the Downtown. Sidewalks in and around the Downtown are a vital part of the infrastructure. They must be wide enough to accommodate two-way pedestrian traffic (approximately six to eight feet wide, but up to ten feet in retail/restaurant areas), and they must provide interesting views, shade and a feeling of safety.

There is currently vacant and marginal development surrounding the Downtown which imposes a barrier between the neighborhoods and the Downtown. This area could be infilled with professional offices and higher density housing that would both strengthen the Downtown and provide a more attractive connection.

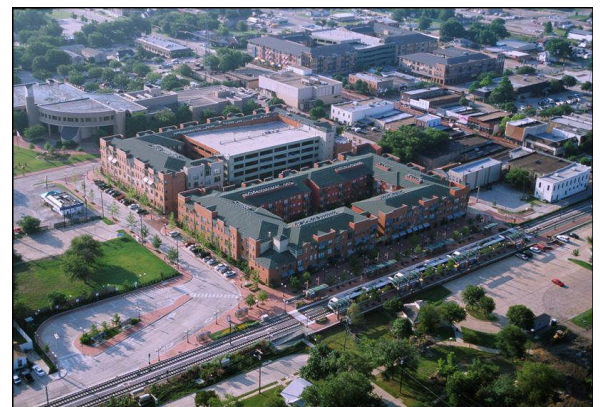






## Parking Strategy

The Downtown needs a long term parking strategy - one which consolidates visitor and employee parking in 2 to 3 convenient locations around the periphery of Downtown. These public facilities would provide a location for employees to park so that they do not consume convenient street parking intended for customers. They would also result in a very efficient use of spaces (thus reducing the total needed by 10-15%), as well as provide reliable availability of parking and avoid the need for visitors to circulate through the streets trying to locate a vacant space.



Parking garage which includes public parking, and is lined with building to minimize views of a parking structure. Plano, TX



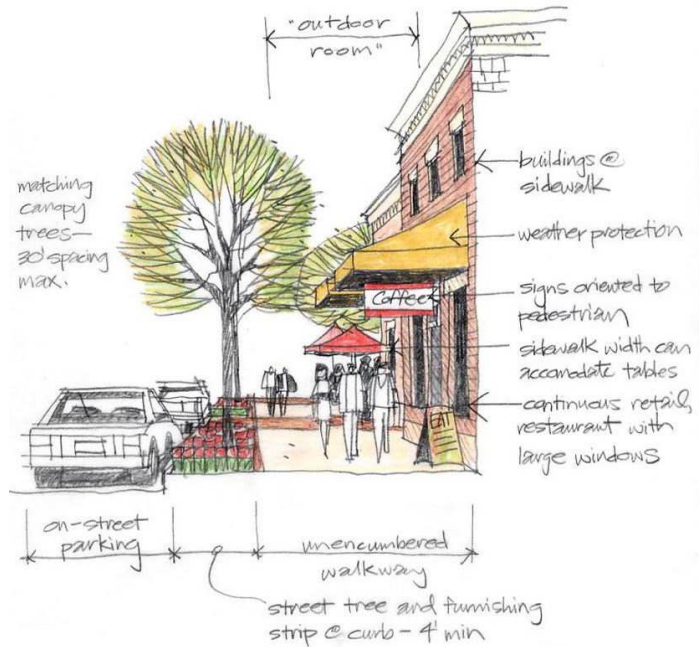


The sites for this parking should have easy access to major roadways in and out of the Downtown, and should be large enough to accommodate a parking garage lined with buildings in the long term.

## Streetscape

A streetscape plan and standards should be adopted which will result in a very attractive environment for pedestrians. Such a plan would include both sidewalk and landscaping standards as well as building and use standards.

Sidewalk and landscaping standards would include trees that will shade the sidewalk and much of the street, adequate width for pedestrian movement and outdoor seating in restaurant areas, street furniture and awnings. Refer to recommended Policy #13 in the *Neighborhood Livability & Image Enhancement Plan*, Chapter 3, for further detail on streetscape concepts.



## Building Form Standards

Building form standards should be adopted to supplement the zoning and historic overlay which address key urban design issues that will result in making the Downtown an even greater place to be as buildings are rehabilitated, new ones are constructed and public works are implemented.

These are generally called "form-based standards" and address issues such as:

- ❖ How developments should address the





**2007 Comprehensive Plan**

street in terms of location of front walls, height and materials;

- ❖ Where and how retail space should be provided to support pedestrian activity and success of retail businesses;
- ❖ How residential should be integrated into the fabric of Downtown;
- ❖ How parking should be addressed; and
- ❖ Flexibility of building space to allow for changing markets over the long term.







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# Downtown Policies

The *Goals & Objectives* in Chapter 2 and the concepts outlined previously within this chapter provide a basis for these Downtown policies. The *Implementation Strategies* (Chapter 9) will outline specific ways in which the City can implement these policies, along with other recommended policies from other chapters of the *2007 Comprehensive Plan*. It should be noted that the policies are in no specific order of importance.

## 1. Adopt Downtown Streetscape Standards

Streetscape elements help create an environment that welcomes and encourages pedestrian activity. The creation of a specific streetscape plan would help the City know where to concentrate its capital investments in Downtown by prioritizing improvements, thereby allowing the City to make the most impact with the investment made. Streetscape elements considered should include:

- ❖ Sidewalk standards;
- ❖ Landscaping standards;
- ❖ Building design standards;
- ❖ Identification of key pedestrian corridors (which will help determine where retail-at-grade and prioritized streetscaping should be located); and,
- ❖ Street furniture ideas.



## 2. Adopt a Form-Based Code for Downtown

A form-based code would provide the City with an effective way to address the form of buildings in the Downtown area. Form-based standards, which would include the location of walls, height, and materials, would be applicable as buildings are rehabilitated and new ones are constructed. The primary goal of such standards is to create an environment through building and site design, but to allow for enough flexibility so that the buildings and sites are able to meet changing market needs over the long term.



### 3. Develop Parking Strategies

Parking should be consolidated into two or three convenient locations around the periphery of Downtown. This would allow on-street parking to be used by retail customers, while creating locations for long-term parking (for employees) and for weekend parking to accommodate a larger number of visitors. These parking areas should have easy access to major roadways in and out of the Downtown, and should be large enough to accommodate a parking garage lined with buildings (to disguise the parking garage) in the long term.



### 4. Adopt Downtown Incentive Policies

Public investment in an area is often needed to spur or support private interest and related private investment until private investment becomes more viable without the support of public monies. City-based incentives signal to the private sector that an area is worth investing in – the investment becomes a better bet because the public sector is doing its part. The City should therefore consider adopting some incentive policies for Downtown, which could include:

- ❖ Participation in needed infrastructure;
- ❖ Low interest funding for garages; and
- ❖ Expedited development approval for proposals.



### 5. Create a Community Development Corporation to Implement Parking and Development Strategies

Many cities have found it helpful to create a Community Development Corporation (CDC) specifically dedicated to efforts within a particular geographic area, such as downtown areas. Waxahachie could benefit from the creation of a Downtown CDC, which could focus on activities such as:







## 2007 Comprehensive Plan

- ❖ Acquiring key parking locations;
- ❖ Consolidating property for development;
- ❖ Leveraging surplus public property;
- ❖ Facilitating the development process (e.g., proposal approvals and permitting).

The City currently has a 501-C3 non-profit organization called the Waxahachie Partnership, Incorporated (WPI). The WPI may be able to perform the functions as it has been recommended a CDC perform, depending on how the WPI was originally formed and whether it has the powers to perform these functions under its charter. If the WPI is able, then the WPI's role in relation to Downtown should be expanded to include these functions, and the formation of a separate CDC would not be necessary.



## Conclusion

This *Downtown Strategies* document represents a continuation of many planning efforts the City has undertaken for the Downtown area. While the C<sup>3</sup> Master Plan provided an in-depth and meticulous outline of various recommendations for Downtown, this document provides a "big picture" assessment of what needs to be done in a practical sense. A clear policy framework is provided with clear steps that should be taken to help maintain and improve the special place that Downtown Waxahachie is and represents for the future. If followed, the *Downtown Strategies* should help the City maintain the uniqueness of Downtown while enhancing it for future generations.