

Urban Design

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diseminar *vt* : to disseminate, to spread
disensión *nf, pl -siones* : dissension, disagreement

disentería *nf* : dysentery

disentir {76} *vi* : to dissent, to disagree

diseñador, -dora *n* : designer

diseñar *vt* **1** : to design, to plan **2** : to lay out, to outline

diseño *nm* : design

disentimiento *nm* : dissent

disertación *nf, pl -ciones* **1** : lecture, talk **2** : dissertation

disertar *vi* : to lecture, to give a talk

disfraz *nm, pl disfraces* **1** : disguise **2** : costume **3** : front, pretense

disfrazar {21} *vt* **1** : to disguise **2** : to mask, to conceal — **disfrazarse** *vr* : to wear a costume, to be in disguise

disfrutar *vt* : to enjoy — *vi* : to enjoy oneself, to have a good time

disfrute *nm* : enjoyment

disfunción *nf, pl -ciones* : dysfunction — **disfuncional** *adj*



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Urban design is the organization and distribution of design elements like streets, buildings, and public spaces, in accordance with design principles like balance, rhythm, emphasis, variety, and unity. The practice of urban design reflects social, economic, aesthetic, functional, and symbolic intentions. Ultimately, urban design is a mix of problem-solving and art.

Laredo's current urban design is the sum of all its individual elements, the built environment and the natural environment considered. Community members felt that there is room for improvement.

Good urban design allows for the future redevelopment or reuse of areas in a way not necessarily perceived when originally designed and constructed. It also allows flexibility of use and allows areas to reinvent themselves over time.

Where the urban design of Laredo has been successful, places were created that people have enjoyed and taken care of for generations. Laredo, like all cities, is a work in progress. Through thoughtful planning and careful implementation, the city's design can make Laredo an ever better city in the future.



Iturbide Street



Typical Neighborhood Street



Linear parks along waterways with multiuse paths bring people close to nature.

I feel that if we make arts and culture, downtown, walkability, healthier food, affordability, and education our main focus, jobs will be created.



COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Context Sensitive Development

During the public process, participants described how they did not want a “one size fits all” approach to the urban design of the city. New development should be sensitive to context. Downtown is envisioned as an urban center with a dynamic mix of uses. The historic neighborhoods have a locally distinct character which new development needs to respond to. And the new suburbs have a spacious, driving-friendly character.

However, even in the new suburbs, an overwhelming majority of participants during the public process said that new development needed to promote walkability, ensuring that new neighborhoods are connected to one another as well as to the existing neighborhoods throughout the city. They described pedestrian, bike, and transit networks that were safe, comfortable, and inviting.

More Walkable Mixed-Use Neighborhoods

The desire for more walkable and mixed-use development has probably never been more prescient; younger generations are not obtaining licenses and driving to get around at the same rate as their parents. Instead, younger folks prefer to live in places where walking, biking, transit use and car sharing are present. In addition, preferences among the baby boomer generation increasingly include the desire to live in a mixed-use neighborhood.

More Useful Public Spaces

Members of the community reiterated during the public design workshop that the city needed more public spaces, parks, and that existing public spaces also need to be made more accessible and useful. In addition, city streets are an important part of the public realm and need to reflect the multimodal nature of envisioned future transportation patterns.

In making more public spaces, including parks, plazas and improved streets, it is important to keep in mind that the average walking distance a person is willing to travel before considering driving is generally one-

quarter to one-half of a mile if the walk is interesting and safe. Locating new parks or plazas should involve strategic insertions within neighborhoods - placing them within walking distance from the highest percentage of households possible.

Another variable to consider is that large parks or public spaces are not necessary for every neighborhood; a small, but useful park within one-half mile from a household is a valuable asset. Large public spaces are often located at the edge of several neighborhoods where there is a lot of activity; these places are typically iconic and often serve as the meeting point for a variety of planned and informal events.

There are multiple methods for achieving more useful parks. For example, programming specific activities, such as a dog park or a splash pad, are ideas that many expressed would benefit Laredoans throughout the city.

Prioritize Streets for Walking and Biking

How will citizens travel in the future? The city has begun to provide more options. Initial street improvements to increase walking can include the addition of sidewalks on streets where they are missing and prioritizing key routes for planting street trees. Bike infrastructure, that is sensitive to the context of each neighborhood has been considered.

Residents discussed how on primary bikeways, bike infrastructure should be separated from the vehicular travel lanes and have a buffer. On secondary and tertiary bikeways, street design should include traffic calming techniques to slow the speed of vehicular traffic where people are walking and biking. The inclusion of on-street parking should occur where it is possible.

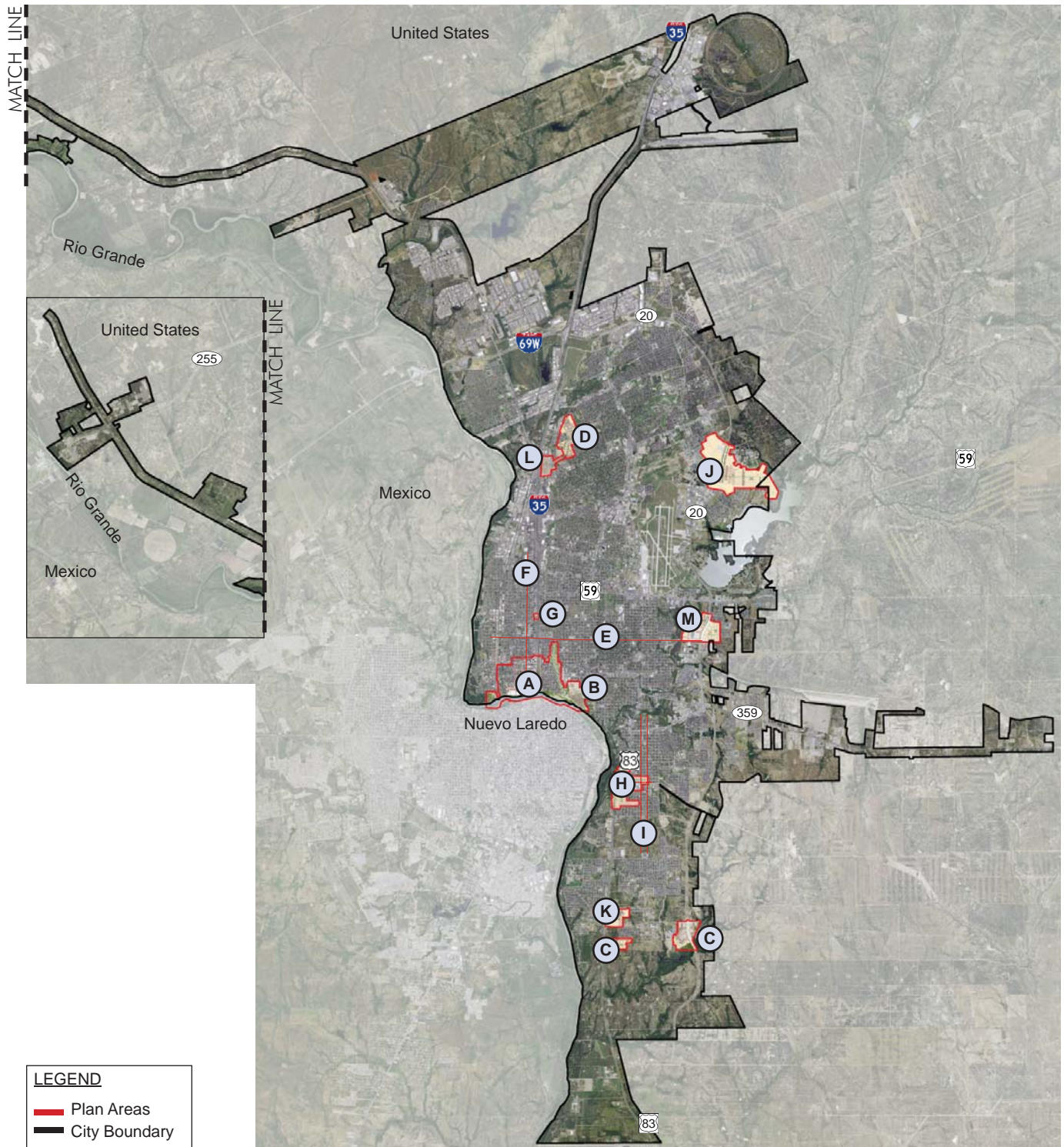
STRATEGIES

Sample Area Plans / Opportunity Sites

Laredo is diverse and the urban design concerns and strategies for each area of the city differ depending on the current form of development, varying types of development pressures, and physical characteristics. Although some strategies are universal, specific concerns may apply to different parts of the city. For each general area of the city, sample areas have been selected that focus on redevelopment opportunities and strategies for reimagining the existing environments into viable, flexible, development patterns that meet many of the city's overall development goals. Further development should concentrate on enhancing, connecting, and retrofitting existing urban areas with sustainable development in an ecologically responsible manner. These sample area plans are described in this chapter.

Opportunity Sites

- (A) Downtown
 - New Neighborhoods
- (B) A New Downtown Neighborhood - Kansas City Southern Rail Yards
- (C) New Neighborhoods in Southern Laredo
- (D) New Neighborhood in Northern Laredo
 - Older Neighborhood Improvements
- (E) Repurposing Clark Boulevard / Park Street
- (F) San Bernardo Avenue
- (G) Santa Ursula Avenue & Jefferson Street
 - Connecting South Laredo
- (H) Zacatecas Street
- (I) New York Avenue & Louisiana Avenue
 - College Campuses & Their Role in Placemaking
- (J) Texas A&M International University - A New University Neighborhood
- (K) Laredo Community College South Campus
 - Sprawl Retrofit
- (L) West Delmar Boulevard
- (M) Clark Boulevard & Bob Bullock Loop



A Prosperous and Affordable Laredo

The Challenge:

According to the U.S. Census, the median household income for Laredo in 2015 was approximately \$39,711. The Office of Housing and Urban Development suggests that the definition of affordable housing is, "In general, housing for which the occupant(s) is/are paying no more than 30 percent of his or her income for gross housing costs, including utilities..." Unfortunately, according to a 2016 study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) a household with two incomes from minimum wage jobs cannot afford the housing market in Texas. Coupled with the fact that Laredo residents devote approximately 32% of their income each year to driving-related costs, Laredo residents could benefit from a range of strategies to alleviate the cost of living.

The majority of housing options currently offered in Laredo are single-family, detached houses. A deficiency in living options contributes to an unaffordable housing market. Local zoning regulations also create an impediment to constructing affordable housing options. The current restriction in R-3 (Mixed Residential District) zoning requires a minimum lot size of 1,200 square feet per one bedroom dwelling unit with 400 square feet per additional bedroom. This requirement encourages suburban development even within urban quarters of the city.



Strategies:

Multi-Modal Transportation Options

Providing a well connected fabric of pedestrian-friendly urban streets that accommodate multi-modal forms of transportation would allow for and encourage walking, biking and the use of mass transit. This will help to encourage a healthy population in Laredo as well as reduce the dependence on car traffic and the annual driving-related cost burden on Laredoans.

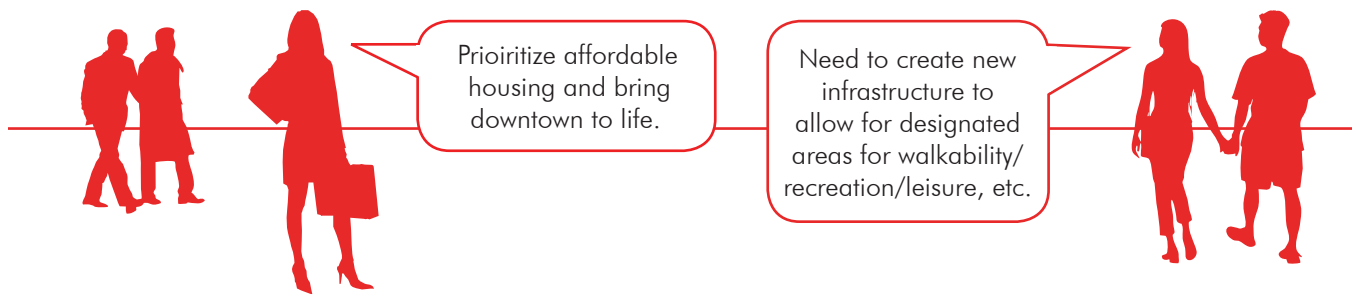
Housing Diversity

In addition to a multi-modal transportation network, a diversity of housing types within walking and biking distance of downtown and employment centers should be encouraged. Current residents are faced with a limited choice of dwelling options, dominated by single-family detached housing. Allowing for row houses by right in R-3 and R-2 zones rather than by special permit will help to encourage a diversity of housing options.

Allowing for the construction of smaller dwelling units arranged in larger apartment buildings and courtyard apartments will increase the offerings to residents. In order to achieve this, the minimum lot size per dwelling unit should be relaxed in R-3 zones particularly within the downtown neighborhoods. Adjusting the zoning in these locations will accommodate a variety of dwelling options.



Providing a connected network of streets, bike facilities and transit options would make it possible for Laredoans to reduce their annual expenditures on automotive transportation.



The inclusion of live-work units into the current Laredo zoning code should also be considered. Live-work buildings add flexibility and financial options for people who rent or own these properties. Accommodating professional services in the same building as the dwelling unit allows the building owner to pursue tax benefits and eliminate the need to drive to work. By making use of these benefits, a resident is more able to take entrepreneurial risks which could contribute to the vibrancy of Laredo.

Allowing residents to rent out an ancillary unit on their property should be considered as well. These units can take the form of cottages, or "granny-flats". Currently these can only be used for family members and are not permitted to be rentals. Relaxing this regulation could allow a property owner to increase his or her income, provide an economical housing option for renters and increase the diversity of a neighborhood.

Financial Incentives

In conjunction with the various transportation and housing options, policies should be established that incentivise the construction of affordable housing units mixed in with market-rate housing. This can be achieved by providing tax benefits to developers and land owners for achieving and maintaining a certain percentage of affordable units in new or existing developments. Certain federal and state organizations such as the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service (TLIHIS) work with organizations or governments to help establish policies to promote affordable housing.

Federal and state agencies such as the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as well as the State of Texas offer financial incentives to developers and property owners in the form of grants or tax benefits. In many instances, these programs have yielded positive results in achieving affordable housing markets and should be considered along with adjustments to zoning code regulations in an effort to achieve a more prosperous and affordable Laredo.



Relaxing lot size restrictions and allowing for other building types by right such as townhouses and live-work units will add diversity to the housing stock in Laredo and could help reduce the cost of living when implemented along with financial incentives.

A New Downtown Neighborhood

Kansas City Southern Rail Yards

The Kansas City Southern Rail Yards occupy a very strategic location adjacent to the Azteca neighborhood, and only a short distance from downtown Laredo. The site is on a bluff overlooking the Rio Grande, next to the mouth of Zacate Creek. The rail yard operations can be relocated to a location better suited to modern day needs, leaving only a few underutilized warehouse buildings on the site. Potential redevelopment of the rail yards represent a once in a generation opportunity to create a complete, mixed-use, walkable, urban neighborhood close to the downtown.

The plan envisions a complete neighborhood with a diverse mix of housing types, businesses, and civic uses laid out in an interconnected network of walkable streets. A series of public plazas and greens are intermixed in the neighborhood following the original tradition of development in Laredo. Street-oriented buildings line the streets and public spaces

with doors and windows creating a pedestrian-friendly, urban environment. Streets are lined with shade trees to encourage walking and biking even during Laredo's hot summer months.

The Rio Grande frontage is reserved for a grand riverfront park. Development along the Rio Grande has historically turned its back to the river, reinforcing a sense of isolation from the international border. The redevelopment of the rail yards provides an opportunity to celebrate the border with a one-of-a-kind public space overlooking the Rio Grande, the international border, and Mexico that all Laredoans can enjoy. The fronts of buildings should face the new park, the riverfront and provide space for riverfront restaurants, shops, and residential lofts with views to the river.

The water treatment plant at the confluence of Zacate Creek and the Rio Grande will be relocated, providing additional space for the riverfront park.



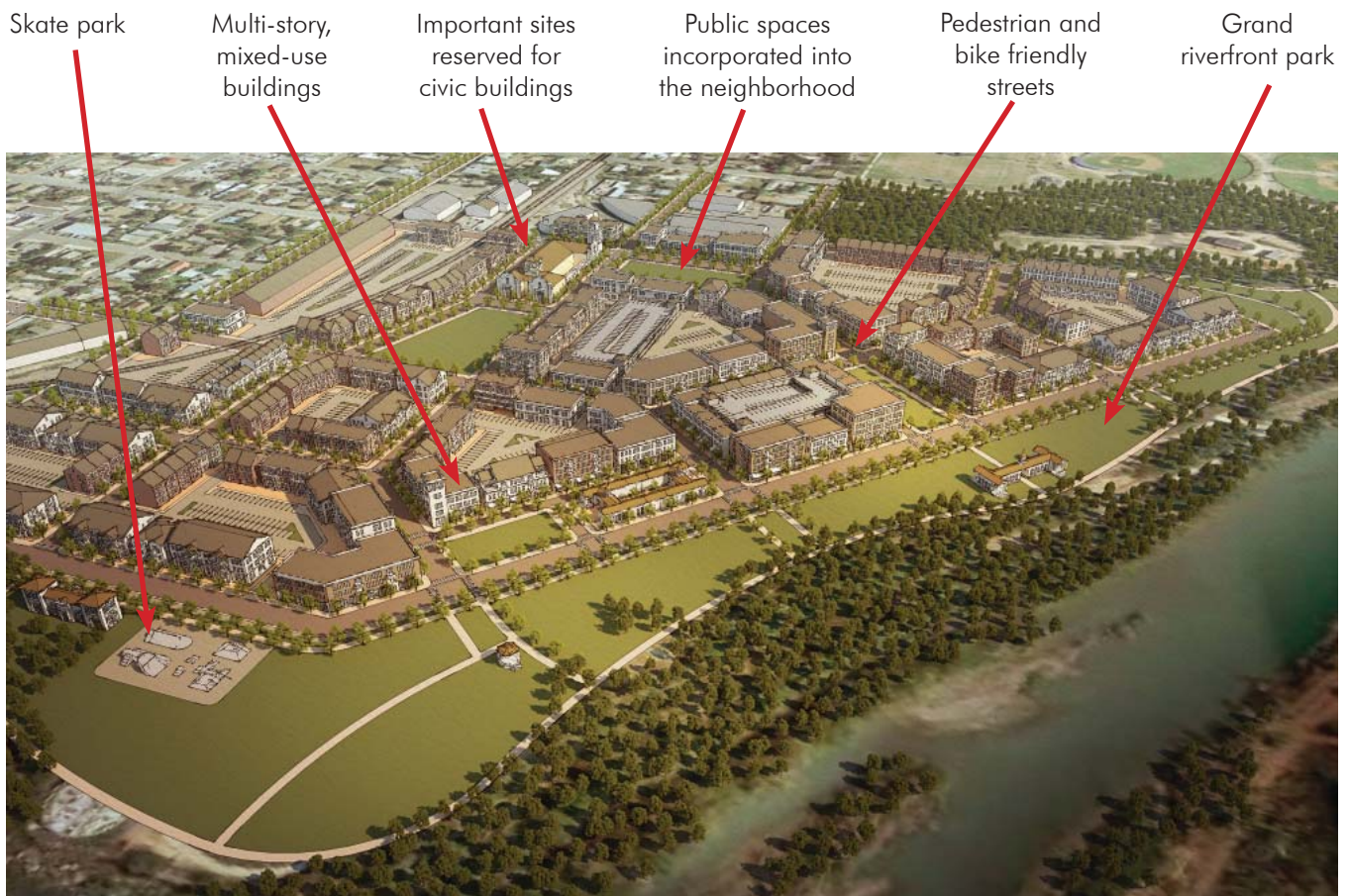
Proposed Kansas City Southern Rail Yards Neighborhood

The treatment plant is currently situated on a prime location overlooking one of the most unique, natural features in the city.

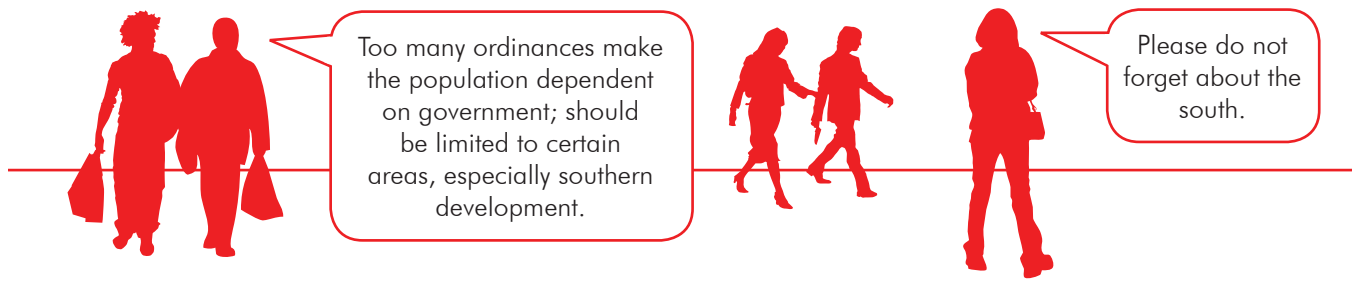
The Zacate Creek is a valuable natural resource that needs to be restored, improved, and celebrated. The restoration of the Zacate Creek can provide a catalyst, not only to the redevelopment of the Kansas City Rail Yards, but for the restoration of the historic Azteca neighborhood. An additional bridge over the Zacate Creek, perhaps at Zaragoza or Water Street, can create a stronger connection between the rail yard redevelopment, the Azteca neighborhood, and downtown Laredo.



Aerial view of the existing Kansas City Southern Rail Yards and water treatment plant.



Aerial view of the rail yard redevelopment with a grand riverfront park overlooking the international border.



New Neighborhoods

New Neighborhoods in Southern Laredo

South Laredo is growing as parcels of land are developed as single-family neighborhoods. At the same time, there is a lack of amenities and services for the Laredoans that live this far south. Many residents have to drive north for miles to meet simple daily needs.

While the parcels along Zapata Highway are zoned for commercial use, it is important to integrate residential, office, and other uses. Providing a mix of uses will help create a supply of retail customers within close proximity to stores. It will also help reduce the distance people need to travel to meet some of their daily needs, greatly reducing or often eliminating the need for travel by car for every trip.

Many of the parcels along the highways are large and lend themselves to large-format retail. This type of single-use development has its economic benefits, but also results in an unwalkable auto-dominant environment that increases congestion on the regional road network. The benefits of large-format uses can be maintained, while mitigating the drawbacks, by integrating them into a traditional street and block network. Large parking fields typically associated with large-format uses can be accommodated in several ways. In most cases, the parking can be located within the interior of a block adjacent to the use. Being located within a block structure also allows on-street parking to be used to meet some parking needs, as well as allowing for passenger loading zones and parking directly in front of retailers.





Northern Laredo

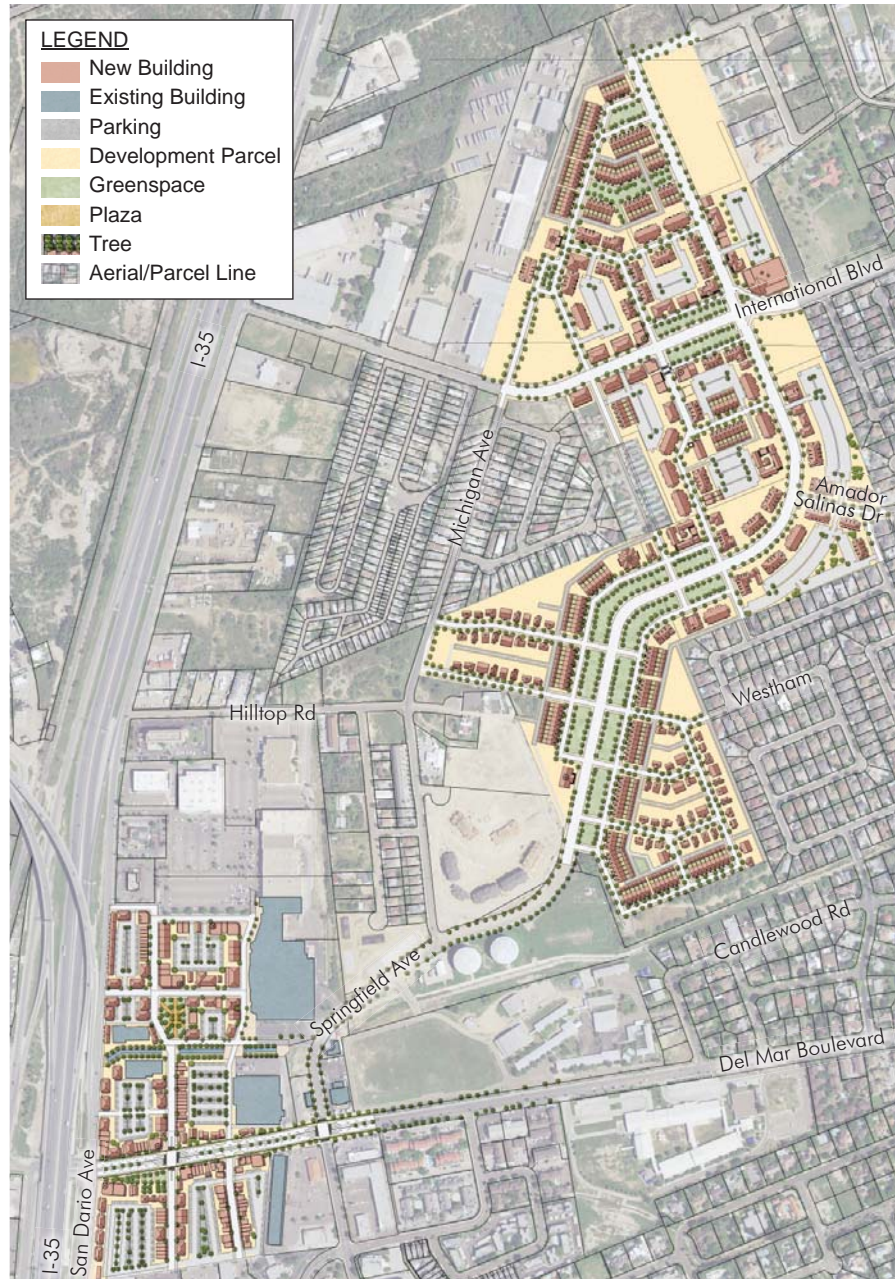
The area that is currently largely comprised of vacant parcels surrounding the intersection of International Boulevard and Springfield Avenue is one of the most important opportunity sites for an infill neighborhood in northern Laredo.

This crossing of major thoroughfares connects the area to and makes it easily accessible from the entire city. International Boulevard begins at I-35 and extends east and then northeast to the very edge of the city. Springfield Avenue runs south through central Laredo and almost to the edge of the Rio Grande. There is an opportunity to also connect Springfield Avenue to the north, possibly all the way to Bob Bullock Loop.

The area is currently surrounded by predominantly single family house fabric, as well as a selection of relatively drive-to apartments, commercial complexes, and warehouses.

If planned and designed carefully, there is an opportunity to create a much needed truly urban, mixed-use, walkable center for northern Laredo at the crossing of International Boulevard and Springfield Avenue.

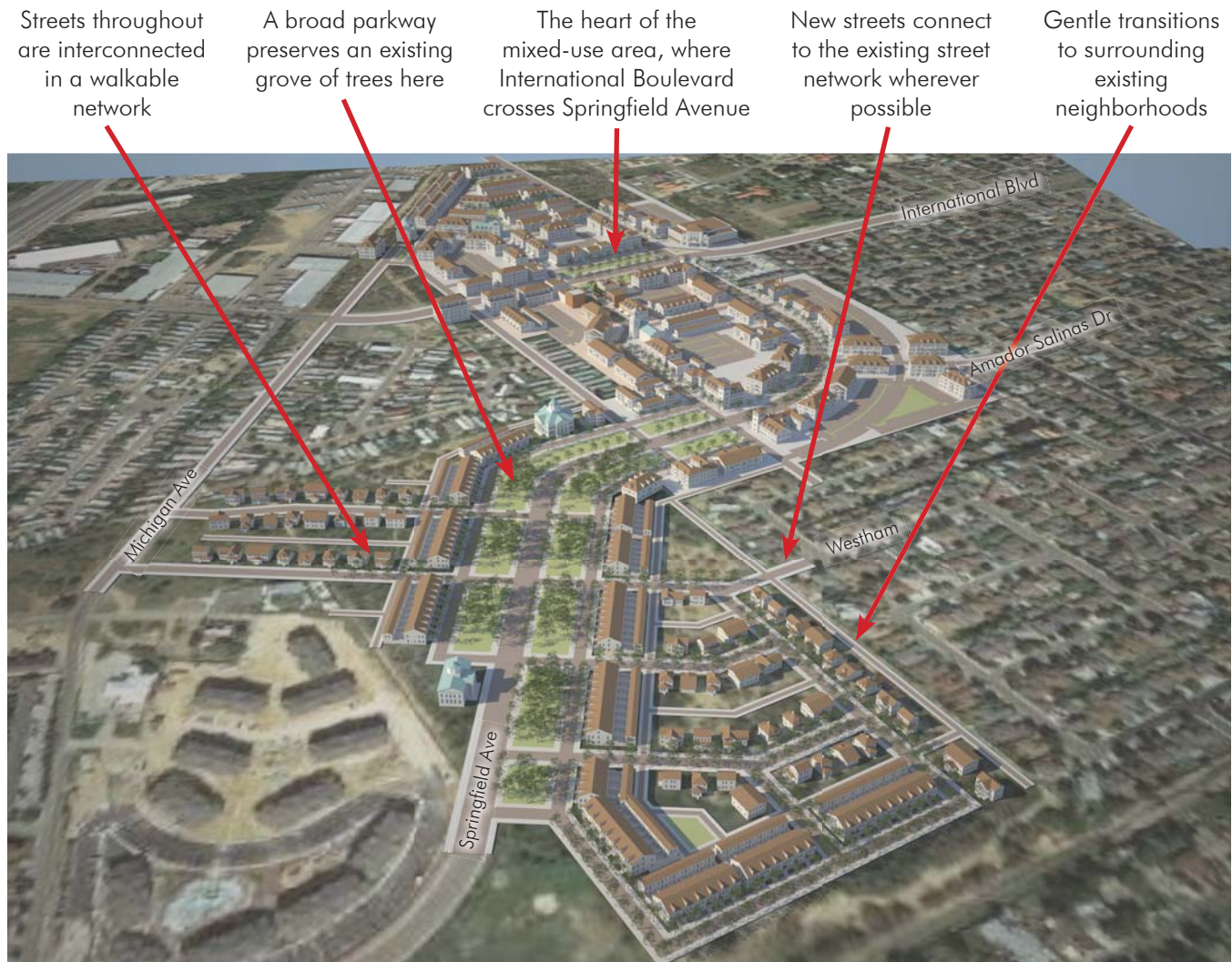
The following pages contains some of the key design principles that should be applied.



Connectivity

First, Springfield Avenue should connect through to International Boulevard from Del Mar Boulevard. Then the area should be traversed with an interconnected network of blocks and streets. This will distribute traffic, allowing roadways and intersections to be more compact. Connectivity will also shorten the distance for many trips, increasing the feasibility of

walking and biking rather than only car use. Dead-ends and cul-de-sacs should be avoided wherever possible. Every opportunity should be taken to connect new streets to the street network of existing developed areas. Blocks should be compact - kept to a maximum average perimeter of approximately a quarter mile so they can be conveniently circumnavigated on foot within just five minutes or so.



Aerial view of new mixed-use development at the intersection of International Boulevard and Springfield Avenue.

Grammar of Building Fronts and Backs

The fronts of buildings facing public spaces (streets, parks, squares etc.) should be designed with plentiful doors and windows to provide “eyes on the street”. Building fronts can also provide shelter to pedestrians with appurtenances such as awnings, colonnades, and porches.

Building backs, by contrast, should accommodate service functions such as loading, trash and parking, and should be concealed from view from public spaces.

Urban Character

This area should be a focus for a robust mixture of building types and uses. While transitions to surrounding suburban neighborhood fabric should be designed sensitively, this area should be urban in character and should function as a true mixed-use walkable center.

Awnings, colonnades and porches provide shelter for pedestrians

Broad sidewalks and street trees increase pedestrian comfort

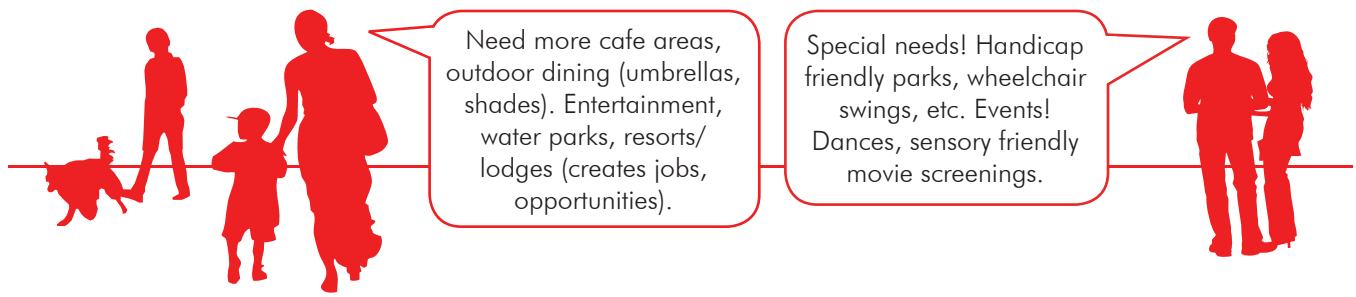
Important sites are reserved for civic buildings and focal architecture

Plentiful doors and windows provide “eyes on the street”

Fronts of buildings face the public space



A main street near the heart of the mixed-use area.



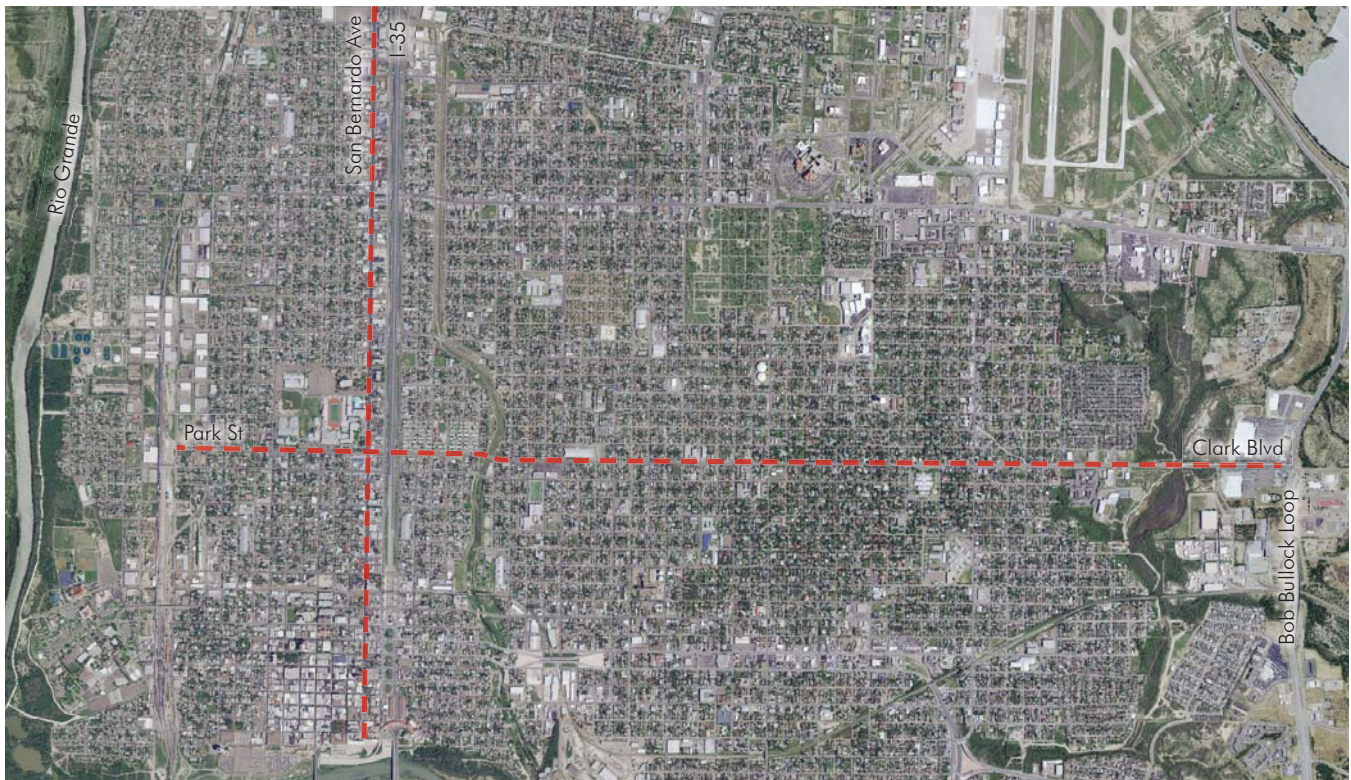
Older Neighborhood Improvements

A large portion of Laredo was developed with the same consistent block structure as the downtown. The small block size should be seen as an asset. Neighborhoods should be studied to see if additional park space can be added. Major connecting roads should also be examined for how they can better support the surrounding neighborhoods. A few examples of rethinking streets and infill development illustrate how small improvements can lead to larger investments and change the way a neighborhood is regarded.

Repurposing Clark Boulevard / Park Street

Clark Boulevard/Park Street is one of the main connectors that links east and west Laredo just north of the downtown core. It begins as Park Street by the railroad tracks in the west and crossing under I-35. It passes by public housing before crossing Zacate Creek and turning into Clark Boulevard. The street continues along neighborhoods until crossing Chacon Creek and ending at Bob Bullock Loop.

The typical street section is two lanes in each direction with the outside lane being wide enough to accommodate on-street parking. At some points the road widens enough to have a center turn lane. The sidewalks are often broken. Although through its length it is surrounded by a small block structure that connects it to the surrounding neighborhoods, it often has a disconnected and auto-oriented commercial areas.



Aerial View of Laredo's historic neighborhoods.

Recommendations for Future Improvements

The first step in the conversion of an auto-oriented, commercial strip into a walkable urban thoroughfare is to optimize the public right-of-way (ROW). Continuous sidewalks, shade from landscaping and buildings, and on-street parking are critical. The public ROW is the common element tying all the various properties along the corridor together. By reconfiguring the ROW first, public investment can be leveraged to catalyze private redevelopment investments.

The street should be rethought of as a commercial edge to the surrounding neighborhoods. The travel lanes could be reduced to one travel lane in each direction and parallel parking. After an initial look at traffic counts, except for the occasional red light cycle, Clark Boulevard could easily handle a diet and still remain a free flowing roadway. Right sizing the road will leave enough space within the existing curb-



Intersection of Park Street and San Francisco Avenue - Existing Conditions

to-curb dimension to create a separated two-way cycle track. Crosswalks should also be added at each intersection. New buildings should be street-oriented and could have residential or offices on upper floors.



Park Street - proposed two-way cycle track and new street-oriented development.

Build Complete, Whole Public Spaces

As private redevelopment occurs on individual parcels, the emphasis should be on creating a series of complete urban spaces. Finished, whole public spaces are inviting places where people want to be. It is critical when building a street segment, square, or plaza that the buildings shaping all sides of the space be constructed in order for the full value of the space to be recognized.

Correctly Orient Building Fronts and Backs

When implementing a block and street network, be sure that the front presentation faces of buildings face streets, squares, and plazas. Service functions such as trash collection, loading, and parking should be located in back and be concealed mid-block. When this pattern is followed, public spaces, which occur between adjacent blocks, will be faced with high-quality façades and will therefore feel like inviting places to be.

A Rich Mix of Building Types and Uses

A variety of building types, sizes, and uses can be accommodated within the historic grid. Mixed-use buildings with retail ground floors can be placed facing important shopping spaces. This can transition to multi-family residential fabric, which can then transition smoothly to single-family detached residences.

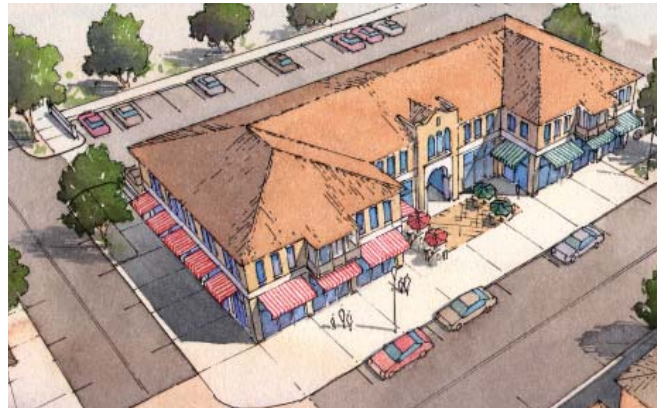
Setting a Walkable Precedent

As the first parcels along a suburban corridor begin to redevelop into a walkable format, they serve as a seed for additional walkable redevelopment. Over time, one parcel at a time, an auto-oriented corridor can grow into a remarkably multimodal pedestrian and bike-friendly thoroughfare.

The retrofit of strip corridors into great walkable urban thoroughfares is a long-term process. Change often happens incrementally when a multitude of property owners are involved. A key to encouraging property owners to begin the process of retrofitting is to give

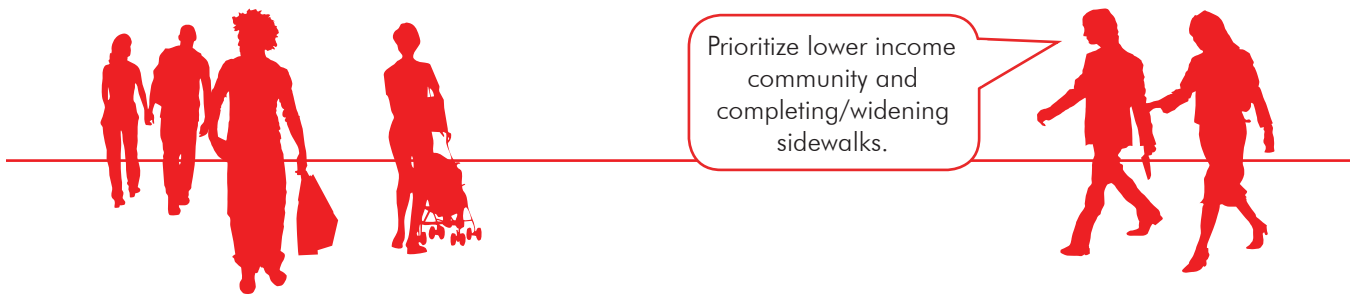


Version 1: This placita, or small plaza, configuration is ideal for corner sites. The two buildings are offset subtly to create a usable open space. An arched walkway provides pedestrian access from the rear parking lot, while connecting the buildings on their upper floors.



Version 2: This placita is formed by a "U"-shaped mixed-use building. A ground floor pedestrian passage through the building provides access to the rear parking area.

them a strategy to achieve a high quality public space without necessarily needing the participation of neighboring property owners. With careful attention to building and parking configuration, great public spaces can be achieved on remarkably small parcels.



San Bernardo Avenue

San Bernardo Avenue runs in a north-south orientation and functions as a location for business. It was historically the corridor that ran from the border north to San Antonio and beyond until I-35 was constructed. The area was developed with a continuation of the small block pattern begun in the downtown. East-west streets connect this commercial corridor directly to the adjacent neighborhoods. The street grid should encourage people from the neighborhoods to walk to this corridor to visit businesses, but overtime the street has created a hostile environment to pedestrians.

Sidewalks are very narrow and located immediately adjacent to moving traffic. This combined with the lack of shade and street furniture discourages pedestrian traffic. Often paved parking lines the street. This has the affect of creating a parking lot linear to the streetscape which is less safe for pedestrians and discourages walking.

Buildings are typically set back a considerable distance from the street and are often surrounded by paved parking lots. Having a wide variety of setbacks and isolated buildings degrades the definition of public space and detracts from the quality of the urban fabric.

The "San Bernardo Avenue Reallocation and Restoration Project" (June 2008) establishes some good strategies for improving the pedestrian experience. These include: tree planters, parallel parking, encouraging the relocation of the building mass closer to the street, and the inclusion of human-scaled street lights and furniture. However, there are certain adjustments to this plan that would better utilize the right-of-way to enhance San Bernardo Avenue.

Recommendations for Future Improvements

There are several strategies to reorient development to be more pedestrian friendly and improve the quality of place along San Bernardo Avenue.

As noted in the "San Bernardo Avenue Renovation and Restoration Project," buildings should be located at their front property line with an uninterrupted wide sidewalk to better define the streetscape. Local examples from historic areas of Laredo suggest that a majority of these buildings should be in line with little variation in distance from the street. Specific attention should be given to existing architectural details, window opening sizes and relationships to the building, materials and colors in order to integrate new development with the historic context. These should also be done in conjunction with the community to help shape the desired identity for the neighborhood.



San Bernardo Avenue - Existing Conditions

Cherish the riverfront along the entire length of the city.



Build a culture of great family values. Improve on customer service all throughout Laredo (stores, restaurants, gov. entities).

Slight variations in the height of structures provide visual interest, and taller structures such as towers give a sense of place and motion down the avenue. Small green spaces along San Bernardo Avenue could be added to give visual breaks as well as locations for people to rest and gather.

The pedestrian realm could be better served by reallocating space within the right-of-way to widen the sidewalks and include options for bike lanes. Widening the sidewalks will allow for more generous tree planters where their shade can be enjoyed by pedestrians while also providing more space

for pedestrians. This also has the added benefit of accommodating sidewalk café tables which would make walking more attractive by increasing the visual interest along the sidewalk and provide a destination.

Bicycle lanes would increase the pedestrian-friendly nature of San Bernardo Avenue by encouraging a multi-modal method of transportation and provide a lower cost option to safely get around. While a protected bike lane would be ideal, the tight curb to curb dimension only allows for a dedicated bike lane in traffic. Care should be taken to create a lane wide enough to prevent conflict with opening doors.

Buildings located along the edge of the sidewalk

Wider sidewalks, street furniture & cafés

Varying Building Heights

Parallel parking & bike lanes

Focal architecture

Architecture & landscaping provide shade & shape the street



San Bernardo Avenue - Recommendations for Future Improvements

Santa Ursula Avenue & Jefferson Street

The sparse connectivity from the east to west sides of I-35 results in an unfortunate physical division through the center of the city. As a result, the handful of streets that do connect receive a greater level of importance as gateways from one side of the city to the other.

Jefferson Street is one such thoroughfare. Presently, the entrance to the west side of the City of Laredo along Jefferson Street is physically inauspicious. The arrangement of development currently tends to be auto-oriented. There is a lack of application of fundamental principles of place-making such as the physical shaping of the street space and provision of well-connected and shaded sidewalks. Parking dominates the visual landscape.

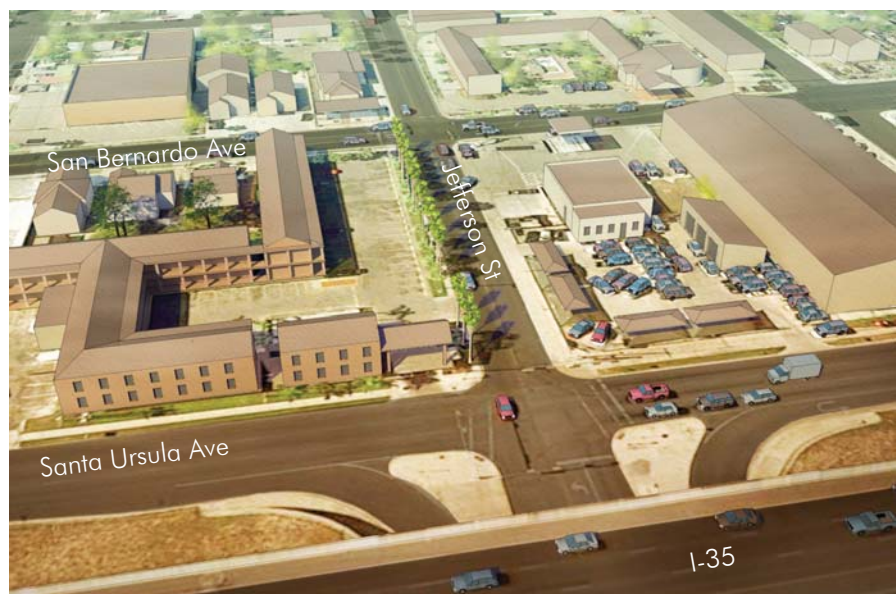
Recommendations for Future Improvements

In the future, steps can be taken to incrementally improve the experience and sense of place for those passing through this important gateway.

First priority should be placed on connecting sidewalks and protecting them from moving vehicles with regularly spaced trees. This may also be done in conjunction with the addition of on-street parking and/or bike lanes.



Plan View

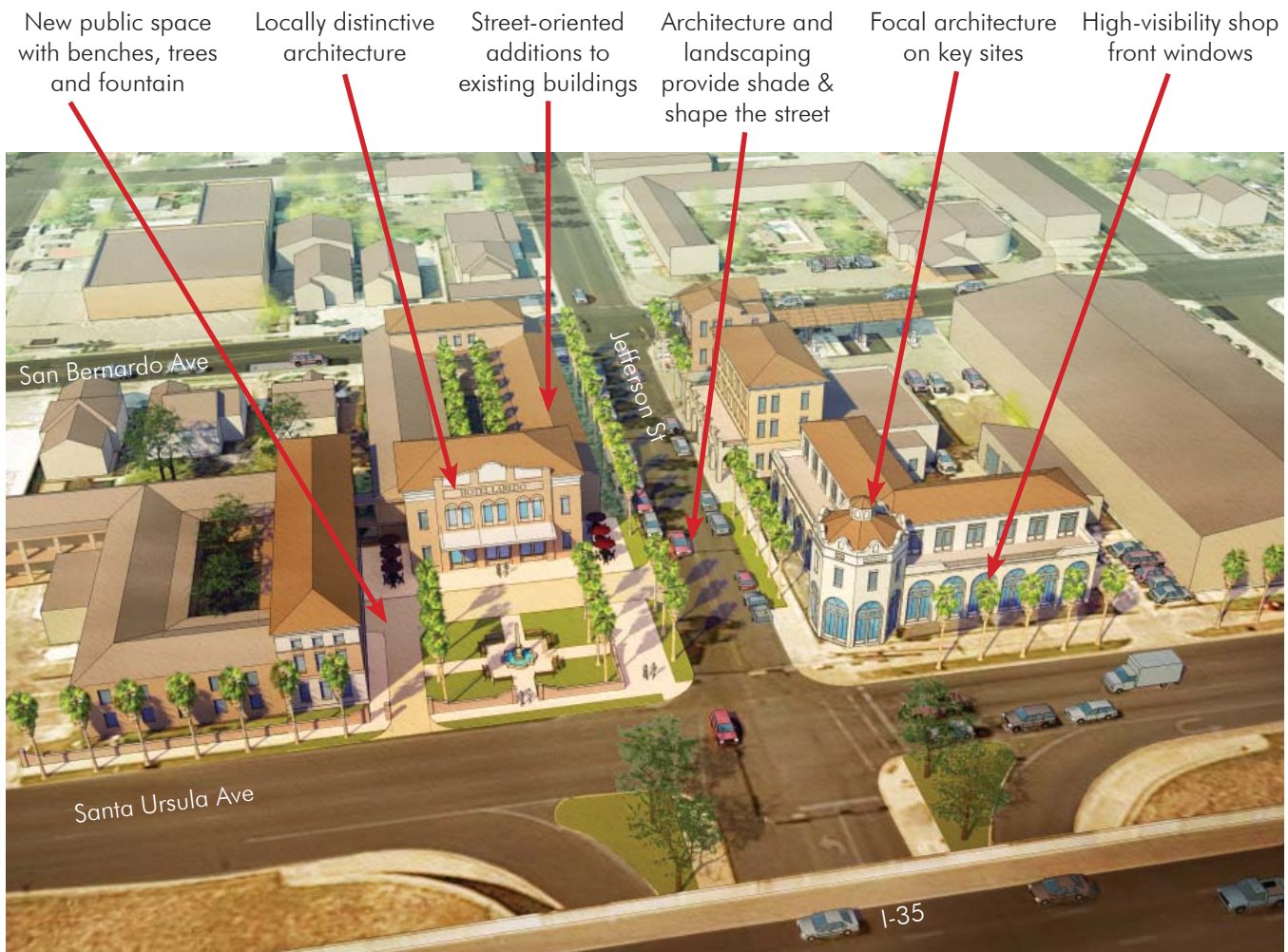


Jefferson Street from I-35 - Existing Conditions

Next, when configuring new development on parcels, attention should be given to shaping the public spaces with the fronts of buildings. This can be done in a variety of ways. Below is illustrated a new building placed up close to the street; the focal corner is emphasized with a prominent tower element. On the left is illustrated a building's primary entrance placed behind a forecourt / drop-off plaza. This forecourt is landscaped as a signature public space with an arrangement that leads people easily to the front door of the building.

New buildings should be articulated with plentiful doors and windows providing “eyes on the street”. The scale of buildings – both height, and horizontal rhythm – should be calibrated with regard to reinforcing the identity the community desires for this part of Laredo.

Architectural details such as canopies, parapets, fenestration, and molding patterns can also help to reinforce the connection of new architecture to Laredo's distinct character.

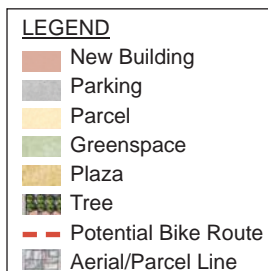


Jefferson Street from I-35 - Recommendations for Future Improvements

Connecting South Laredo

South Laredo is primarily residential, although there are several schools (both primary and secondary), as well as pockets isolated of commercial activity, particularly along Highway 83.

In many instances, the schools, medical services, and commercial uses, such as the H-E-B on Zapata Highway, are within a 1/4 mile or 1/2 mile from a majority of residences which would put them within walking distance. However, the existing conditions on most streets in South Laredo do not accommodate pedestrians or cyclists. For example, there are several streets that do not have continuous sidewalks or have existing sidewalks with minimal dimensions like Zacatecas Street, Louisiana Avenue, New York Avenue, Zapata Highway, among others. In addition, the amount of space in the right-of-way for cars is oversized on nearly all streets, and bicycle infrastructure does not exist. There are several opportunities to improve the public realm within the neighborhoods on local streets.



Aerial view of South Laredo

Zacatecas Street Existing Conditions

Zacatecas Street, located in South Laredo, is representative of several neighborhood streets that connect residents to their daily destinations, such as areas of recreation, schools, and retail stores. There are several east-west streets, like Zacatecas Street, that need sidewalks on both sides of the street as well as street trees to define the pedestrian realm while also adding shade.

Based on community feedback, Zacatecas Street (and those that are similar in character) is envisioned to be improved, to become a truly multimodal space, with strategic infill that has an appropriate scale and character. Zacatecas Street is a priority since it serves multiple schools and recreational facilities in South Laredo.

Proposed Retrofit

The imagined transformation can evolve over time. Initial improvements should include a “road diet”, narrowing the space for car travel, while also providing on-street parking for existing residents, schools and neighborhood serving commercial places. Street trees and wide sidewalks – with a minimum dimension of 10 feet by proposed commercial spaces and schools – will be necessary to provide shade and pedestrian comfort.

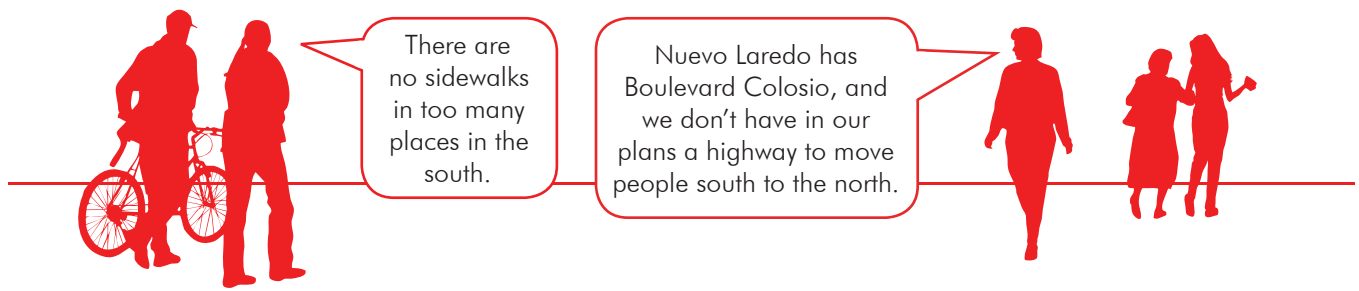


Existing Conditions on Zacatecas Street



Proposed Retrofit of Zacatecas Street

The idea to test the market for neighborhood-serving retail by beginning with a “pop-up” manner of retail which is temporary and does not require large amount of infrastructure or investment for it to occur in that particular location. Overtime, with improvements to the public realm, the temporary retail can transform to be a permanent store or shop. If mobile retail, like food trucks or the equivalent become successful in these neighborhoods, vacant parcels, may transform into small stores or convenience shops, that serve pedestrians, cyclists and students within the area.



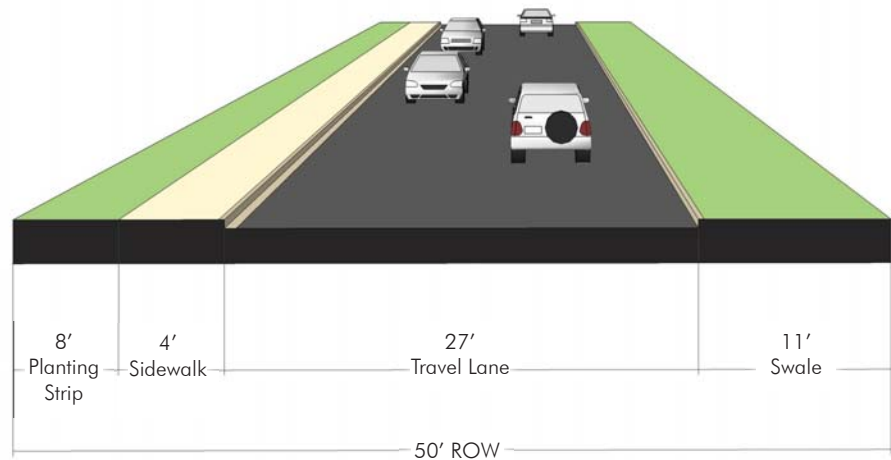
New York Avenue & Louisiana Avenue Existing Conditions

The typical right-of-way for nearly all local streets is 50 feet in this part of the city. There are two north-south streets that are major connectors through South Laredo: New York Avenue and Louisiana Avenue. Both streets travel through the entire neighborhood, connecting to the southern most points at one end, and to downtown neighborhoods at the other end. Each of these streets should be a top priority for retrofitting the neighborhood, making it more accessible for walking and biking.

There are two proposed options for retrofitting these streets within the existing 50 foot right-of-way. The first option involves retrofitting both Louisiana Avenue and New York Avenue to become a one-way pair. Traditionally, one-way car traffic is not ideal; however, if a one-way pair is possible, and improves bike infrastructure as well as adds on-street parking are incorporated, one-way travel could make sense.



Existing view of Louisiana Avenue



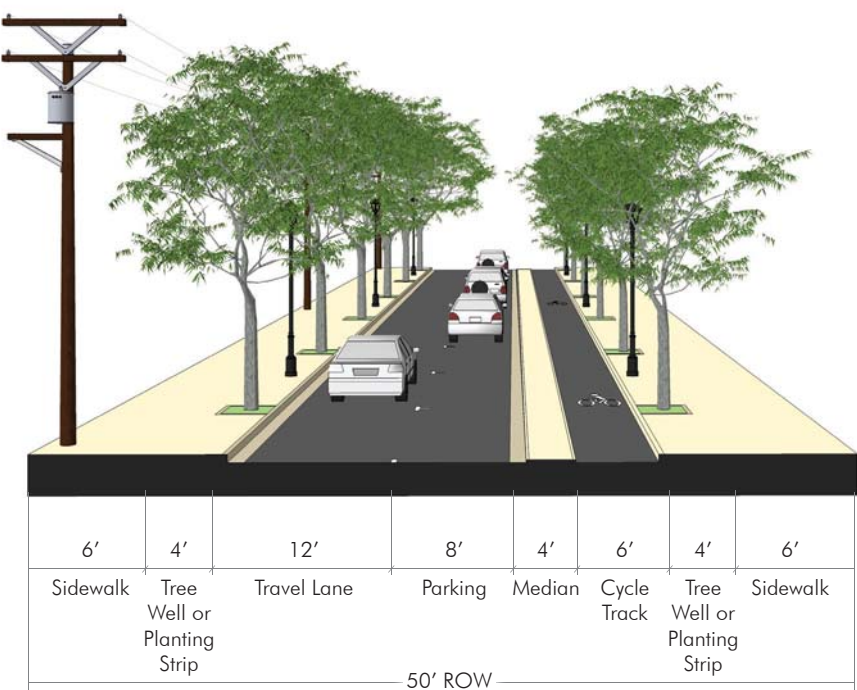
Typical Existing Condition for New York Avenue and Louisiana Avenue

Option 1

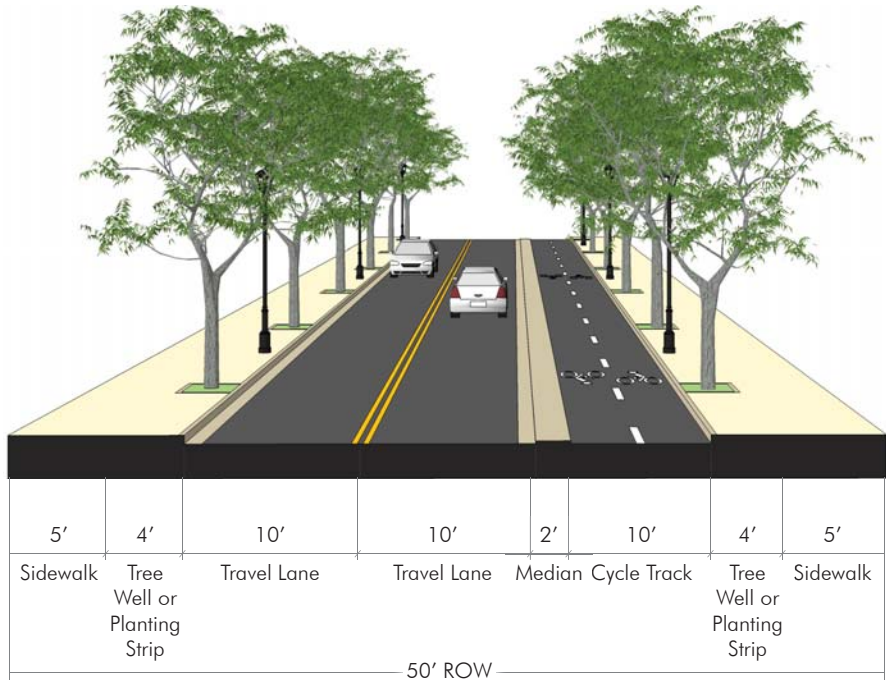
Both Louisiana Avenue and New York Avenue could be retrofitted to have a single ten foot travel lane with an eight feet for on-street parking that can serve area residences and neighborhood businesses. A separated and protected bike lane can be added traveling in the same direction as car traffic. The narrower travel lanes, on-street parking, and regularly spaced street trees are all traffic calming methods. Parallel parking is also a recognized traffic calming technique.

Option 2

In Option 2, either Louisiana Avenue or New York Avenue may be retrofitted. In this scenario, either street would be redesigned to incorporate narrower travel lanes, while maintaining two-way car travel. In addition, a separated two-way cycle track, can be accommodated on one side of the street. Like Option 1, wide sidewalks and regularly spaced street trees provide needed traffic calming. In this version, on-street parking would need to be accommodated on the east-west streets that cross either Louisiana Avenue or New York Avenue; this may be a viable solution since there are few commercial businesses along each street; the existing development is largely residential. The roadway can remain a major collector while still providing a safe comfortable space for bicyclists.



Proposed Retrofit Option 1



Proposed Retrofit Option 2

College Campuses & Their Role in Placemaking

In many cities across the country and around the world, college and university campuses have often served as catalysts for urban and suburban redevelopment. These tight pockets of learning bring together a unique and diverse group of young adults, faculty, and service industry professionals who benefit most from a tight sense of community and connection to the world around them. Not only do they represent an important market for local economies, but they also help to define what their city is today and what it can be in the future.

When college campuses successfully leverage their location and consciously invest in placemaking, through better architecture and urban design, they tend to become popular destinations. This phenomenon is not limited to large brand name universities either; it can happen at many different scales and types of schools.

At the smaller end of the spectrum, for example, there is quirky and eclectic Thayer Street in Providence, Rhode Island. Serving locals and students from Brown, RISD, Rhode Island College, and Johnson & Whales, Thayer Street hosts several independent shops and restaurants that embody the youthful and diverse character for which the neighborhood is known.

At a slightly larger scale there is Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Like Thayer Street, this triangular plaza is not directly affiliated with any one institution. It serves as a common space for students along with locals and tourists. Though today Harvard Square features more chain restaurants and stores than independent ones, it is still notable for its historic architecture and rich mix of uses. The square is surrounded by three to five story buildings which house apartments, offices, institutions, restaurants, and many kinds of stores.



Thayer Street, Providence, Rhode Island



Harvard Square, Boston, Massachusetts



Proposed Cincinnati Avenue, El Paso, Texas

Even in a border city like El Paso, it is possible to find places that exemplify this perfect marriage between campus and urban life. The University of Texas at El Paso has an enclave of urban activity along Cincinnati Avenue and Mesa Street that has numerous restaurants and businesses that cater to students as well as the surrounding neighborhoods. New student housing is also being developed.

As an isolated suburban commuter school, Laredo Community College and Texas A&M International University can learn a lot from other schools' example. Moving forward, they can begin working to create that unique synergy between campus and city that will not only bring the City of Laredo closer to the classroom, but also attract more students to enroll and can be used to help recruit faculty. Laredo is in the enviable position of having a remarkable number of institutions of higher learning for a city its size, including Texas A&M's local campus and both of Laredo Community College's campuses. Strengthening the connection between "town & gown" will provide both immediate and far-reaching benefits for both the schools and the

surrounding community.

Students today are highly mobile and have many choices about where to go for higher education. Laredo must continually raise the bar on the quality of student life in order to continue to be their preferred choice in the future. Student life doesn't just include the experience while in classes, but should be viewed holistically. A close connection between a college or university campus and its surrounding neighborhood can provide a whole host of benefits that it is difficult for a campus alone to provide.

A strong connection between schools and their surrounding community is supportive of the mission to advance knowledge and learning. Universities and colleges are organized with departments focusing on diverse subjects. The reason for this close proximity is, historically, to encourage people of different backgrounds who may be experts in different disciplines to intermingle and connect with one another. These personal connections lead to the sharing of knowledge and cooperation which can lead to crucial breakthroughs in creative problem solving.












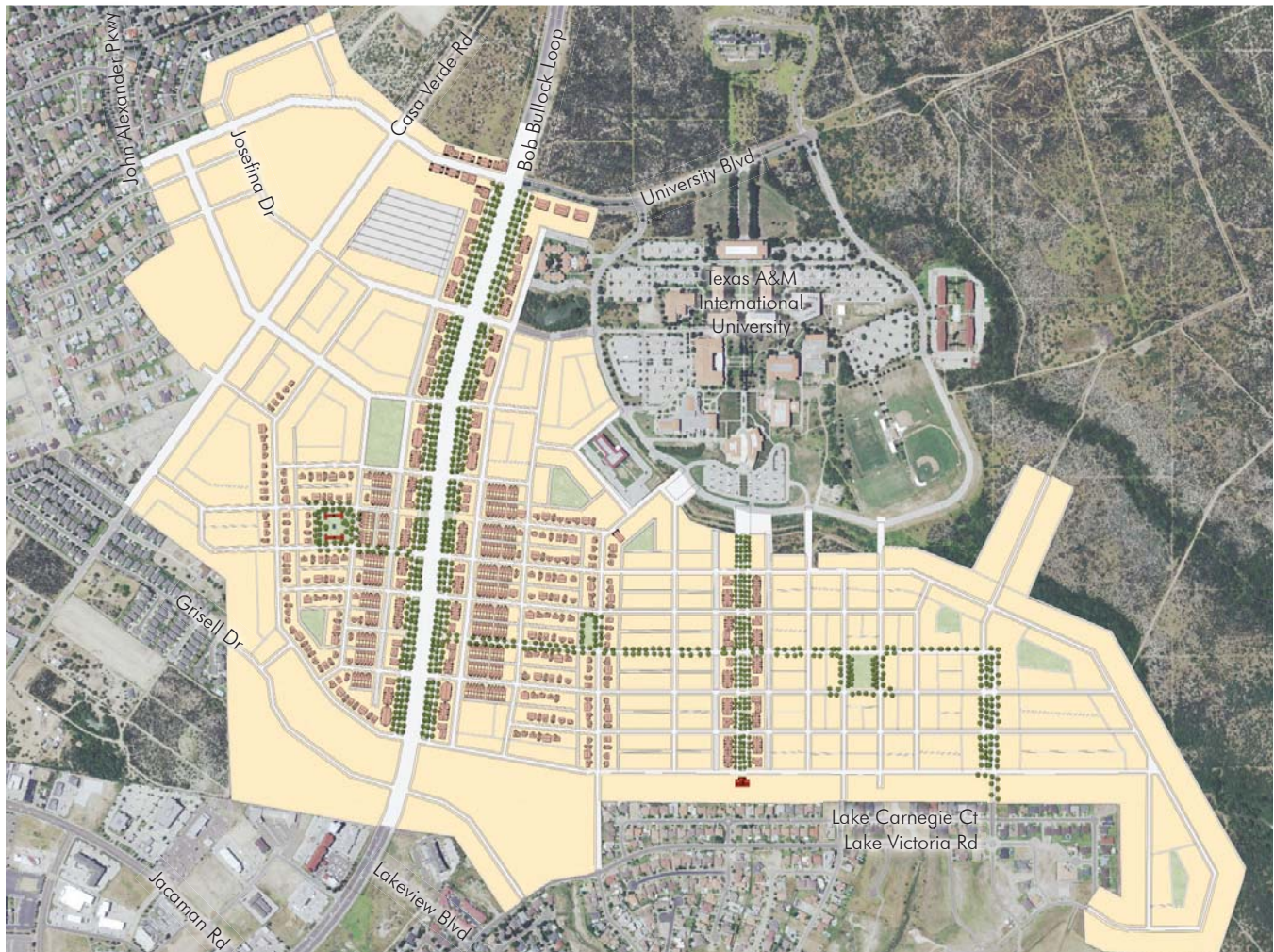
Entrance to Laredo Community College South Campus. The building is pushed back from the street and separated from the surrounding community.

Texas A&M International University

The University

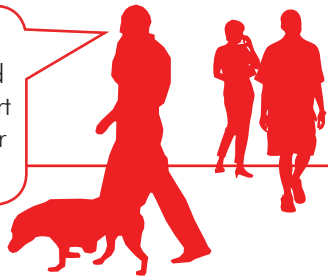
Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) is part of the Texas A&M University System, one of the largest systems of higher education in the United States. TAMIU's 300 acre campus serves over 7,000 students. TAMIU is a major regional educational institution in Texas' fastest-growing demographic area and offers over 70 undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral degrees in the arts and sciences, business administration, and nursing in the four colleges of the University.

| LEGEND | |
|---|--------------------|
|  | New Building |
|  | Parking |
|  | Development Parcel |
|  | Greenspace |
|  | Plaza |
|  | Tree |
|  | Trail |
|  | Rio Grande |
|  | Aerial/Parcel Line |

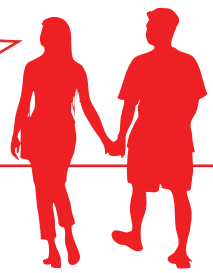


A new neighborhood around TAMIU campus.

Students from all over the country and the world apply to universities in part to take advantage of their location.



We need more degrees in the health field offered in local colleges and universities. The only way to attract new businesses is to develop a talented skilled workforce.



TAMIU's campus is located on the far eastern edge of Laredo, just northeast of Laredo International Airport. The campus is well-planned with buildings harmoniously arranged axially around a series of formal quadrangles.

Located beyond the edge of the urbanized area of Laredo, the campus is currently a drive-to only location that does not facilitate travel by foot or bicycle for students or faculty.

A New University Neighborhood

An opportunity exists to connect the TAMIU campus to the urban fabric of greater Laredo with new development. If this development takes the form of pedestrian-friendly, walkable neighborhood, it will open many possibilities for students and faculty to live within a pleasant walk or bike ride from the campus.

A new "University neighborhood" adjacent to TAMIU could provide a lively, walkable main street environment with cafés, coffee shops, stores and other places for those affiliated with the University to meet and mingle.

Street-oriented buildings and pedestrian-friendly streets

A network of high quality public spaces connects the TAMIU campus to the city

TAMIU campus

Bob Bullock Loop configured as a grand urban boulevard



Looking east on University Boulevard toward the TAMIU campus, across a new University neighborhood.

A mixed-use University neighborhood could also provide a rich variety of residential options. The choices could include single family houses, attached rowhouses, small apartments, larger apartment buildings and even accessory dwelling units. A variety of residential unit types, sizes, and configurations will help to ensure that there are options for a broad variety of household types, age groups, and price points.

A mixed-use neighborhood adjacent to the University could also accommodate a variety of workplaces which could provide employment and business development opportunities for graduates. Such options could include incubator spaces, co-working spaces and other configurations supportive of aspiring business startup entrepreneurs. This could be a special district taking advantage of the adjacent university that specializes in researching and incubating Laredo's future industries.

Care should be taken that a new University neighborhood features the physical design details of walkable urbanism that are echoed throughout this plan.

Public spaces are shaped by the front presentation faces of buildings with plentiful doors and windows

Focal architecture helps identify uses of special importance

A variety of places to linger and mingle

Trees, awnings and colonnades provide shade crucial for pedestrian comfort



A walkable University neighborhood would connect TAMIU seamlessly with Laredo.

Laredo Community College South Campus

The physical environment of places of learning can either support or hamper creative interactions, depending upon their design.

Walkability is a fundamental prerequisite. If people are isolated within their individual automobiles, at the mercy of regional traffic patterns and congestion, the



Architecture & landscaping provide shade

Building facades shape the public spaces

Mixed-use main street

Neighborhood square

Important sites for civic buildings



Aerial view of new mixed-use development adjacent to the Laredo Community College South Campus.

likelihood of interaction and creative discourse developing is greatly reduced.

Basic walkability requires:

- An interconnected network of streets and public spaces that are sized and detailed for pedestrian comfort.
- Sidewalks should be wide and continuous. People should be screened from Laredo's intense sun by street trees or architecture that provides shade with awnings or colonnades.
- Places to walk should be shaped by buildings that present plentiful windows, doors and which are interesting and beautiful to look at.
- Uses should be mixed in a fine-grained way to increase convenience.

Competitive academic achievement and creative problem solving are time and energy-intensive activities. Those striving for excellence in their field of study will benefit greatly from having their daily needs met within a short distance. Places to live, study, shop, eat, and mingle should all be interspersed in a pleasant way.

Once basic walkability is achieved, places to support academic discourse should go even further in their design. Places should encourage people to linger. They should provide comfortable places for people to gather. "Third Places" – neither work nor home but places to just be, like a favorite coffee shop, should be plentiful. People should feel welcome to sit for a conversation, or to sit comfortably by themselves. A wealth of interesting focal points should also be included in the design of places for people to meet and mingle. These could be in the form of artwork, sculptures, fountains or interesting architectural features – anything which can serve as ice-breakers for initial conversations.

Traffic-calmed
and bike-friendly

Architecture &
landscaping
provide shade

Comfortable
places to sit and
to stroll together

Coffee shops, res-
taurants & stores



Places where it's comfortable to linger and converse are crucial when developing near higher learning institutions.

Sprawl Retrofit

West Del Mar Boulevard

The I-35 exit of West Del Mar Boulevard is a classic example of a regional-scale single-use shopping destination. Important anchors, including Target and H-E-B, are housed in big box style one-story buildings surrounded by acres of surface parking lots. West Del Mar Boulevard is relegated to a single purpose: moving the highest number of vehicles in the shortest amount of time possible. Pedestrians and bicyclists are ignored, with the assumption that everyone traveling to these destinations will do so by car.



Existing Conditions



Plan View of Proposed Conditions

The largest faces of Laredo are Highways 35, 83 and 358 - and most of that frontage is hideous. Power lines should be buried.



With the right incentives and land development regulations in place, auto-centric suburban shopping strips like these can be transformed over time into complete neighborhoods that provide all the elements of daily life within walking distance. Many people in Laredo drive to and past these destinations on a regular basis, but hardly anyone loves the area the way it is. What's missing is a sense of place and community. Currently, buildings and signs are close enough to create a sense of congestion, but too far apart to create a cohesive urban environment.

West Del Mar Boulevard will continue to be a street drivers use to get from one part of the city to another. However, creating a new boulevard that balances traffic capacity with safety, placemaking and local character can turn West Del Mar into a destination itself.

Over time, individual parcels can be redeveloped using a pattern of streets and blocks to create a complete urban neighborhood. A diverse mix of buildings, uses, and housing types are all built along an interconnected network of walkable streets. Public squares and green spaces are incorporated into the neighborhood, creating central gathering spaces for residents and visitors alike. Parking is provided behind buildings in mid-block locations, leaving the streets as immersive environments with narrow travel lanes, on-street parking, and buildings adjacent to large sidewalks to encourage interactions between people



Step 2: Street oriented buildings are developed along the edge of the H-E-B parking lot.



Step 3: A complete urban space with buildings on both sides of Del Mar Boulevard is created.



Step 1: Del Mar Boulevard is transformed into a tree lined boulevard.



Step 4: A new public square at the center of the neighborhood.

Our city should stand as an icon of our culture, It should echo the beauty and individuality cultivated within it.



We should require all neighborhoods to have sidewalks and cleared walkways for people's safety. Now people park their cars on walkways making it dangerous.

and accessibility. Just a few changes in the placement of buildings, parking, and streetscapes help to create the character of an urban neighborhood.

Existing anchor businesses can stay in their current configuration for as long as it is economically feasible, and can actually help anchor the neighborhood by bringing in traffic to smaller businesses and restaurants.



Step 5: Underutilized out-parcels are redeveloped with urban buildings.



Step 6: Over time a complete neighborhood is created.

Clark Boulevard & Bob Bullock Loop

The intersection of Clark Boulevard and the Bob Bullock Loop is currently defined by wide roads and large commercial centers. A Walmart Supercenter sits on the northwest corner of the intersection, and a Target on the southeast corner. Conventional retail outparcels have followed. The following illustrative plan shows how careful planning, and development can begin to heal the edges of an auto-dependent environment to create a more walkable, mixed-use neighborhood while still integrating big box regional retailers which are an economic reality. The sample plan area shows how new development is designed around an interconnected network of walkable streets with a series of public spaces that form the heart of the community.

A successful transformation of an auto-dependent suburban center requires a rethinking of the role of streets in the public realm. New streets in suburban areas are often designed primarily as a way to move vehicular traffic. Partly as a result of the design of these streets, development along major corridors tends to turn inward, which further reduces the quality of the streets.

All streets, including major thoroughfares, should create a pedestrian and bike friendly public realm, and new buildings should face the streets with doors and windows. Parking lots should be concealed mid-block to create a continuous building frontage along the street. Setbacks should be rethought to encourage, or even require buildings to be built along the street edge, while at the same time the streets would need to be designed as walkable streets.



When new neighborhoods are built, such as the one envisioned on the northeast corner of the intersection of Clark Boulevard and Bob Bullock Loop, they should be designed around an interconnected network of blocks and streets. Each neighborhood can include a diverse range of buildings and unit types, including mixed-use buildings, apartment buildings, attached rowhouses, duplexes and single family homes. Special sites are reserved for civic purposes at prominent locations in the neighborhoods, and the tradition of public plazas is revived.

Regional shopping centers should also be designed as urban neighborhoods, with a mix of uses facing walkable streets and inviting public spaces. On-street parking is incorporated into public streets, while parking lots are moved to the back of buildings in mid-block locations. Big box stores can still exist in these areas, but they can fit into a block structure rather than within a vast exposed parking field.

Pedestrian-friendly streets are lined by shade trees and on-street parking

A central square forms the heart of the mixed-use district

Multistory mixed-use buildings shape the edges of the public realm

A slow-speed side access lane with on-street parking runs parallel to the Bob Bullock Loop



Aerial view of new mixed-use development at the intersection of International Boulevard and Springfield Avenue.

Urban Agriculture

Community Gardens & Urban Forestry

Throughout the *Viva Laredo* process, the concept of urban gardening in Laredo has been a popular request as citizens imagine the future of their city. An urban garden can be successful in a variety of contexts and locations, including places like downtown and on vacant parcels in existing neighborhoods, like those that are found in south Laredo. Urban gardens can also become the center of new neighborhoods, while helping to maintain both food production and continued growth within the built environment.

The multiple benefits of local food production, particularly community gardens, include physical activity, strengthening friendships and social bonds, food security, and the ability to eliminate the use of pesticides. With local control of food production, organic farming techniques can be employed, resulting in nutritious and affordable food.

In locating neighborhood gardens, an ideal place for this type of community space is often near an existing and popular institution, such as a church or a school. If located adjacent to or even on school grounds, educational courses could use the produce to teach cooking skills, as well as lifelong gardening skills. In addition, if there is extra crop, produce from the garden can be sold at a local farmers market, providing income to the institution that tends the garden. An urban garden or an urban forest also has the benefit of adding beauty to the neighborhood where it is located.

Urban forestry, or harvesting trees for use on city streets and in city parks, is another agricultural use that may occur within the city. For example, vacant or condemned parcels within existing neighborhoods could be split to include space for both gardening and harvesting mature trees.



Cities of all sizes throughout the US are implementing urban gardens.



Neighborhood gardening can be a community-wide activity for all ages. There are several locations throughout the neighborhoods in Laredo, that would be ideal for urban gardens or urban forestry.

Please keep in mind safety and the importance of improving the quality of life of the people.



GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Create places and destinations for people by improving the public realm and focusing on the comfort and interest of the pedestrian, cyclist, and transit user.

Urban Design Best Practices

Goal 3.1: Coordinate land use and transportation policies while making Laredo more walkable, bikable and memorable.

Policy 3.1.1: Determine desired land use, including a varied mix of uses; then design the transportation infrastructure that supports the desired land use.

Policy 3.1.2: Enhance the pedestrian environment. In existing neighborhoods, streets can be retrofitted with sidewalk installation, tree planting and interesting building facades.

Policy 3.1.3: Increase the density and incentivize a mix of uses at key nodes of activity, including downtown, the universities and new development sites.

Policy 3.1.4: Implement transit connections between major destinations, including downtown, the new mall, the universities and the neighborhoods in South and North Laredo.

Policy 3.1.5: New development will consist of compact blocks and lots, representative of the historic block pattern in Laredo; this will promote maximum connectivity and create better walkability.

Policy 3.1.6: Development is encouraged on brownfields if site contamination can be remedied.

Policy 3.1.7: Development is encouraged along existing or planned bicycle networks where additional segments and/or secure bicycle storage can be added to the network.

Policy 3.1.8: Development is discouraged on sites or portions of sites within the 100-year or moderate-risk floodplains as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Where development must occur within floodplains, development should be located on previously developed floodplains or in non-conveyance areas without flooding potential.

Goal 3.2: Update the city's zoning code to implement the plan vision.

Policy 3.2.1: Adjust zoning ordinances to promote mixed-use development wherever desired.

Policy 3.2.2: The city should develop a method of streamlining the process and guaranteed approvals such as permit administrative approvals when development is in accordance with the community's vision as illustrated in the small area plans and urban design best practices.

Goal 3.3: Make Laredo Planning and Zoning Department staff experts in best practices for community development.

Policy 3.3.1: Require all Planning and Zoning Department staff to become accredited in New Urbanism best practices through the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNUA).

Policy 3.3.2: Require all Planning and Zoning Department staff to become certified in LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED ND).

Neighborhood Patterns

Goal 3.4: The City of Laredo should change its growth pattern away from homogeneous land uses and return to a pattern of compact well-connected mixed-use neighborhoods.

Policy 3.4.1: City officials should consider the following neighborhood patterns when evaluating rezoning or development requests and also when locating and designing development on public land, seeking to achieve voluntary compliance with as many patterns as practical. While the land development code and State law ultimately dictate what shall be approved by the city, all design approaches that could increase the function, aesthetics, sustainability, marketability, and livability of projects should be discussed as part of the land development process. A variety of approaches to development should be added and permitted by the code.

The illustrative plans in various elements of *Viva Laredo* demonstrate the application of these design principles to a variety of sites within Laredo.

Policy 3.4.2: The design of new neighborhoods and additions to existing neighborhoods should strive for a mix of housing types to create neighborhoods that accommodate diverse ages and incomes and allow residents to trade up, downsize, or create multi-generational households without being forced to leave the neighborhood. Housing types include both small and large single-family detached homes, duplexes, townhouses, multi-family buildings, live-work units, and accessory dwelling units, and include both rental apartments and units that can be owned by their occupants.

Policy 3.4.3: Neighborhoods should strive to have a clearly defined center and edges that vary in intensity and character.

- a. Each new neighborhood should have a primary civic space such as a square or green near its physical center.
- b. Commercial and office uses at intersections should have direct paths to greens and squares.
- c. When edges of neighborhoods lie along major roads, smaller lots can be placed facing the arterial road to accommodate attached dwelling units.
- d. When edges of neighborhoods lie along natural features, larger lots can be placed there to increase the variety of the neighborhood's housing.

Policy 3.4.4: The design of new neighborhoods and additions to existing neighborhoods should strive for a balance of housing, jobs, shopping, recreation, and civic uses to avoid unnecessary travel and reduce infrastructure and public services costs.

- a. Ideally, 50% of new residences will be within a ¼-mile radius of at least 4 diverse uses such as community-serving retail, services, civic/community facilities, and food retail.
- b. New neighborhoods of 300 units or more on an arterial road should provide a viable location for a corner store.
- c. Home offices and accessory dwelling units should be allowed on every lot.

Building Types & Placement

Goal 3.5: New development should incorporate local building types and public spaces, including the historic plazas found throughout historic Laredo.

Policy 3.5.1: New buildings should create an interesting street frontage, with parking hidden from view, typically located in the rear of the building or below ground. Setbacks requirements should be changed such that this is encouraged.

Policy 3.5.2: The relationship between the fronts and the backs of buildings should ensure that public spaces have natural surveillance; the fronts of buildings should face the primary street adjacent to the property.

- a. Fronts of buildings should face the fronts of other buildings or the sides where necessary; fronts should never face the backs of other buildings.

Policy 3.5.3: Large-format buildings and uses should be developed within a traditional street and block network. Large parking fields typically associated with large-format uses can be located within the interior of a block structure adjacent to the use. The block and street network will allow on-street parking to be used to meet some parking needs, as well as allowing for passenger loading zones and parking directly in front of retailers.

Policy 3.5.4: Local building types that have proven to react well to local climatic and weather patterns will be encouraged.

Policy 3.5.5: The historic plazas should be incorporated into new and retrofitted neighborhoods; plazas and smaller green spaces should be used to accommodate additional uses that supplement the larger public spaces.

Policy 3.5.6: Residences may face minor and major arterials to avoid presenting blank walls. Alleys can be provided by either the city or on private land to create a vehicular entry to the lots instead of vehicular access directly from arterials. Alleys should be either paved or gravel.

Policy 3.5.7: Semi-public building elements such as porches and balconies add to the congeniality of neighborhoods and should be encouraged within front setbacks. This applies to porches, stoops, bay windows, and balconies on residences.

Policy 3.5.8: Outdoor dining should be allowed on city sidewalks provided that chairs and tables are placed in a manner that allows a minimum three foot clear path for pedestrian movement.

Parking

Goal 3.6: Incorporate adequate parking into new development while providing infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation, bike parking, transit or trolley access, and comfortable pedestrian access.

Policy 3.6.1: Parking should be located so that it is hidden from the street, either located behind the building or screened from view.

Policy 3.6.2: The careless placement of off-street surface parking lots can blight surrounding properties and public spaces. This blight can be avoided by using the following principles:

- a. Non-residential and multi-family buildings should have their surface parking lots placed at the side or rear of buildings.
- b. Buildings should have no more than 20% of their lots devoted to surface parking lots, with no individual lot larger than 2 acres.
- c. Parking lots should be designed for pedestrians as well as cars with pathways with double alleys of trees.

Policy 3.6.3: In non-residential and mixed-use developments, businesses and other community services on the ground floor should be strongly encouraged to be accessible directly from sidewalks along a public space, such as a street, square, paseo, or plaza, instead of accessible from a parking lot.

Policy 3.6.4: A majority of the principal entries to buildings should face public spaces such as streets, squares, parks, or plazas instead of facing parking lots.



Policy 3.6.5: New developments should place buildings close to streets using the following principles:

- a. At least 80% of the total linear feet of building façades should be within 25 feet of the sidewalk, and at least 50% of mixed-use and non-residential building façades should be within one foot of the sidewalk.
- b. Buildings should have functional entries an average of every 75 feet along non-residential or mixed-use buildings or blocks.

Policy 3.6.6: Encourage a reduction in the percentage of building walls that face streets that contain garage doors or service bays. A maximum of 20% of front walls containing garage doors or service bays should be encouraged.

Policy 3.6.7: Awnings, balconies, arcades, galleries, and colonnades (privately maintained) should be allowed to extend into the right-of-way of city streets provided that adequate clearances are provided for pedestrian movement and for right-of-way maintenance.

Street Design Principles

Goal 3.7: The City of Laredo wishes to create complete networks of multimodal streets with ample shaded sidewalks and frequent on-street parking.

Policy 3.7.1: Street networks should contain multiple paths for vehicular movement and should be designed using the following principles:

- a. New neighborhood streets should connect to the existing street network in all adjoining areas when practical.
- b. Bend new streets with restraint. Bending streets creates deflected vistas, but exaggerated curves are disorienting and difficult to connect to adjoining street networks.

- c. Challenging intersections can calm traffic, such as pinwheel intersections, small roundabouts, triangular intersections, and staggered intersections.
- d. Dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs should be allowed only when required by topographic or geographic constraints or when conditions on adjoining property prevent existing or future connections.

Policy 3.7.2: Street networks should be designed using the following principles:

- a. Limit average block perimeters in new development to no more than 2,000 linear feet.
- b. Provide rear alleys for access to mid-block parking spaces, to provide an out-of-sight location for utility equipment, and to allow the fronts of buildings to be free of garage doors and parked cars.
- c. Limit driveway crossings to no more than 10% of the length of sidewalks.

Policy 3.7.3: Street spaces should be designed to create prominent public spaces with a comfortable sense of enclosure using the following principles:

- a. Provide street trees on both sides on at least 60% of streets, between the travel lanes and sidewalk, at intervals averaging no more than 40 feet.
- b. Provide 90% of streets with sidewalks at least 8' wide on retail or mixed-use streets and 5' wide on all other streets.
- c. Provide on-street parking on at least 70% of both sides of all new and existing streets.

Policy 3.7.4: Neighborhood streets should be designed for pedestrians and bicyclists by moderating the speed of motorized vehicles:

- a. 75% of new residential-only streets should be designed for a maximum target speed of 20 mph.

Civic Space Principles

Goal 3.8: The City of Laredo wishes to supplement its neighborhood and regional park system with small civic spaces that are accessible to all citizens and are memorably placed in all new neighborhoods and mixed-use developments.

Policy 3.8.1: Civic buildings achieve prominence by strategic placement at the ends of streets, across greens, or at the center of greens, and by having grander proportions and materials than surrounding buildings. Civic buildings should be embedded within communities or on the edges of communities.

Policy 3.8.2: Civic spaces are outdoor gathering places for public use. Civic spaces can be defined by a combination of physical factors including their size, intended use, landscaping, and the character of their edges. New neighborhoods should be designed around optimal locations for civic spaces. Civic spaces should not be designated in awkward locations on residual tracts of land that are left over during the subdivision process.

- a. A civic space, such as a square, park, or plaza of at least 1/6 acre in size, should be within a 1/4-mile radius of 90% of dwelling units and non-residential building entrances.
- b. Scale civic spaces comfortably for users, avoiding civic spaces that are too large.

- c. Enclose most civic spaces with building fronts to create a comfortable sense of enclosure; 75% of the perimeter of civic spaces should have a minimum building height to street width ratio of 1:6 (a minimum of one foot of building height for every 6 feet of width of the street that circumscribes the civic space).

Policy 3.8.3: Encourage, or even incentivize home owner's associations (HOA's) to purchase lots from developers for parks.

Policy 3.8.4: Require new developments to provide adequate park space.

Policy 3.8.5: Make a Parks Ordinance addressing the proposed Civic Space Principles.

Lighting, Signs & Utilities

Goal 3.8: Streets and spaces are safe and inviting with adequate lighting and clear signage.

Policy 3.9.1: Adequate and pedestrian-scaled lighting should line each street in Laredo.

Policy 3.9.2: Utilities should not be located on the sidewalk, allowing clear access for pedestrians between destinations.

Policy 3.9.3: Install clear signage throughout Laredo, directing residents and tourists to downtown, parking facilities, cultural destinations, and natural environments.