Introduction

Downtown is the cultural, social, and historic center for Denton. Its unique identity should be preserved and given every opportunity to flourish. This document provides recommendations for Denton’s leaders to use in maximizing downtown Denton’s economic development opportunities and increasing the quality of life downtown can provide. It is based on future growth trends and stakeholder interests.

This chapter discusses the purpose for preparing the plan, sets the project context, highlights key transit influences on downtown, and calls for reaching downtown’s future potential.
A. Purpose of the Plan

The purpose for creating the Downtown Implementation Plan (DTIP) for Denton is to develop a set of physical plans and detailed recommendations to increase economic development in downtown Denton. The DTIP defines specific action items to be taken to implement the recommendations, and it establishes strategies for when and how these action items should be implemented. The DTIP is divided into five elements: land use, parking, parks/open space, architectural guidelines, and street standards, which help to organize and detail the recommendations.
The DTIP will serve as a catalyst for additional growth and development in the downtown area. It will facilitate a coordinated effort among the city, business owners, and residents to achieve downtown’s potential.

The DTIP project study area encompasses approximately 155 acres, which corresponds with the “Downtown Core” area identified in the Downtown Master Plan. The study area is generally bounded by: Withers Street to the north, Exposition Street to the east, Sycamore Street to the south, and Carroll Boulevard to the west. This area includes the site of the proposed Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) transit center.

Exhibit 1.1 illustrates the project study area with an aerial photographic base with key streets labeled. The downtown core area functions as a true downtown area, serving as a centerpiece for the city.

The DTIP was prepared over an eight-month period, beginning in October 2009, and was completed in August 2010. Stakeholders, business owners, city officials, and residents contributed to the DTIP process. Their contributions have helped to achieve a flexible vision and market-based framework for new downtown development.

B. Context

Denton, Texas is the 11th largest city in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. It is located at the northern apex of a triangle formed between Fort Worth and Dallas illustrated in Figure 1.0.

Denton is the county seat of Denton County; it was established in 1857. Both the county and city are named for John B. Denton, a preacher and a lawyer.

One of Denton’s most enduring symbols is the beautiful and historic County Courthouse on the downtown square. The building was erected in 1896 using Texas limestone and it was restored in 1987. Today, the Courthouse and associated square remain emblematic icons for the Denton community.

Denton has both small-town charm and big-city arts, culture, education, and entertainment. Denton is home to two state universities, which diversify Denton’s population: the University of North Texas and Texas Woman’s University.
Downtown Denton, like many other downtowns nationwide, declined in the 1950s and 60s. However, downtown Denton has reversed that trend in the last 20 years. Several factors have contributed to new growth in downtowns, including the activities of baby-boomer and empty-nester populations. Additionally, growing community pride and appreciation in a community’s history have led to healthier and more active downtowns. A vibrant downtown boosts the economy and quality of life in a community.

Denton’s city leaders recognized the importance of revitalizing and supporting downtown early on. Denton became a Texas Main Street city in 1990, and is one of 86 such cities located in Texas at present. The Texas Main Street program began in 1981, providing a lifeline for aging downtowns. The program provides support and training for downtown revitalization.

In 2002, The City adopted the Denton Downtown Master Plan. Its primary focus is to provide a balance between encouraging development, including exploring partnership opportunities with private investors, and simultaneously ensuring that proper design practices are employed. The master plan includes the following eight goals for the future of downtown. Downtown Denton should:

- be a vital part of Denton’s economy;
- be a source of civic pride;
- be a place to live, work and play;
- contain compact and concentrated activities;
- contain a variety of things to do;
- be pedestrian friendly and an enjoyable place to walk;
- have linked parks and open spaces;
- be attractive and well designed.

This DTIP is designed to achieve the 2002 master plan goals for downtown. The implementation strategies will guide and coordinate public and private investments, and will steer the location and types of future improvements.
C. Influences on Downtown

Denton will become the terminus for the DCTA transit rail line in 2011. The ‘A-train’ rail line will link Denton with passenger rail service to the city of Carrollton, where riders can transfer to the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) system and continue into the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. Two transit stations will be built in Denton, one of which will be located downtown, within a half mile of the Denton Courthouse Square. Denton’s leaders recognize the development potential of this important new transit linkage therefore, it is addressed in the DTIP.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is a compact, walkable, pedestrian-friendly development focused around a transit station; it provides an attractive alternative to automobile-dominated lifestyles. The Dallas Morning News recently noted the potential of TOD in a January 11, 2008 article, titled “The TOD trend.” The article emphasizes the higher quality of life and higher property values associated with TOD developments. The author also notes that investing in transit has double the economic benefit to a city of a similar-valued highway investment. Dallas has invested millions of dollars in TOD development over the last few years, and Denton may be expected to follow a similar pattern.

The North Texas Daily, the University of North Texas student newspaper, reported on DCTA’s growing ridership in an April 16, 2010 article, titled “Denton public transportation hits record high.” DCTA has experienced record ridership over the last two years and a broader ridership mix, including both students and commuters. Most riders are coming to Denton from Carrollton, Lewisville, and downtown Dallas. This ridership is expected to increase once the ‘A-train’ arrives in Denton.

Downtown - “The Real Deal”

The City Council has consistently identified downtown as a high economic development priority. Downtown provides residents a strong sense of place, and has been referred to as “Denton’s living room.” Downtown is home to more than 800 businesses and has been the business hub of the city for more than 150 years. In addition, it is rapidly becoming a destination as an arts and entertainment district. Denton has been featured in the New York Times as a “hotbed of alternative music” (May 11, 2008). Downtown hosts more than a quarter
million visitors annually at 24 events and festivals, and it has become a vibrant, 24-hour, seven-day-a-week place to be.

Downtown Denton, with all of its economic, cultural, and historic resources is poised to be a significant player in the North Texas region with occasional flashes of national brilliance. This DTIP provides a guidebook for city leaders, private developers, and decision makers to take downtown into this next exciting phase.

2008-2009 Reinvestment Figures for Downtown

- 11 projects for a total of $919,500
- 10 net business starts, relocations, and expansions
- 46 new jobs created

City of Denton Economic Development Partnership 08/09 Annual Report