Existing Condition Assessments

Downtown Denton’s existing urban form, street alignment, and natural systems developed over a long period of time. A clear understanding of this past and the present conditions is necessary to plan for Denton’s future. A holistic approach was used to define the existing conditions in downtown Denton.

This chapter describes the existing conditions and study area trends. It addresses land use; parking; parks, recreation, and open space; streets and linkages; solid waste; and architectural design. An assessment of each topic is presented and supported with tabular and graphic data. This information provides the basis for the Chapter 4 recommendations.
A. Introduction

The second phase of the DTIP project focused on data collection and analysis. This work was conducted concurrently with the first phase public involvement work. It comprehensively identified and documented all aspects of the study area’s physical, social, and economic conditions. The bulk of the data collection and analysis was accomplished during the first few months of the project, although some data collection and analysis continued to the end of the project. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used; and a variety of data sources and analysis techniques were used, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS), property appraiser data, surveys, and site reconnaissance.

The first task was to create a series of base maps to identify and graphically display pertinent information about downtown, including: land use and zoning patterns, street connections, property ownership, parcel data, and the locations of various types of parking. The resulting land use, parking, parks, streets, and solid waste maps are included in this chapter.

Additionally, site reconnaissance was employed to determine which areas of downtown the community most values and what makes these areas successful, as well as to verify GIS data. The full consultant team and city staff physically observed downtown conditions on multiple occasions at different times and on different days. Each site visit was documented photographically.

The following section presents the existing-conditions findings and the consultant’s assessment of those conditions. The information is organized into the following topics: land use; parking; parks, recreation, and open space; streets and linkages; solid waste; and architectural design.
B. Land Use Assessment

Land use conditions are important to analyze to be able to understand the downtown marketplace, and thereby make the best decisions for the area. Parcel data and land use information was extracted from the city’s GIS data base and then field verified. The following data categories were examined:

- Land use
- Ownership
- Parcel size
- Building height
- Building area
- Residential density
- Floor-Area Ratio (FAR)
The study area comprises approximately 155 acres, 387 parcels. Exhibit 3.0 illustrates existing downtown land use.

The study-area land use patterns are characterized by three major findings, namely:

1. Commercial, one-story uses predominate.
2. Housing is in short supply.
3. Mixed-use and entertainment uses are generally lacking.

First, commercial uses predominate in downtown, covering 76 percent of the study area. These uses include general business activities, such as retail, offices, and commercial services. The predominance of commercial uses in downtown demonstrates that the existing downtown employment culture is strong. Downtown commercial buildings are predominately one story in height, with the exception of the buildings surrounding the Courthouse, which are mostly two stories.

Second, downtown lacks housing. Both single- and multi-family uses comprise a total of only five percent of the study area. Single-family residential uses are located at the perimeter of downtown along the east, south, and west edges of the study area. A small pocket of multi-family residential housing is located along Oak Street. The shortage of residential units is out of sync with the goals and vision included in the Downtown Master Plan, which states that “downtown should have residents, offices, shops, and entertainment.”

Finally, a limited number of buildings mix residential with office and/or retail uses, achieving a mixed-use pattern of land use. The few that exist downtown are located along all four sides of the Square. The shortage of mixed-uses in downtown is an unrealized opportunity for creating a vibrant and lively downtown. A few restaurants along Industrial Street may be considered the beginning of an entertainment district; however, a higher concentration of these types of uses is needed to become a true entertainment district for downtown.
Exhibit 3.1 summarizes downtown’s land use characteristics, providing information on acreage, square footage, total number of parcels, and the percentage of each land use type evaluated. Also, the exhibit gives information on ownership, building types, and vacant property. This data provides an overview of the existing land use conditions, as well as a baseline to measure future development/redevelopment changes.

Data provided from City of Denton GIS

Land Use Summary
Exhibit 3.1
C. Parking Assessment

Parking is a key element needed to revitalize downtown Denton and maximize its economic development opportunities. However, vehicular parking is not a stand-alone component; it is closely tied to traffic circulation, pedestrian mobility, development patterns, parks and open space, and solid waste collection; and it must be balanced with downtown Denton’s “complete street” strategy.

Field surveys, photographic interpretation, and personal interviews were used to define downtown parking conditions, resulting in an understanding of both real and perceived parking problems. The findings resulted in recommendations which address both current and potential future downtown parking situations.
The downtown study area was mapped to identify the areas that currently accommodate, or could accommodate, parking. Three categories of parking were identified and mapped:

1. Public Parking Lots
2. Public On-Street Parking
3. Private Parking Lots

Exhibit 3.2 shows these three parking categories. Private parking is shown in blue on the graphic, public on-street parking is shown in red, and red linear boxes are used for on-street public parking that current regulation and street conditions permit.

The blocks within the study area were divided into 11 specific parking zones, titled DTIP parking zones. Each zone is large enough to view relationships between public and private parking with the development they serve.

The Photographs 3.0 images show a variety of downtown parking conditions, which reflect the current conditions and land uses in downtown Denton, including a demand for parking in the Courthouse Square area.

Public Parking is defined as parking that is signed as “public parking” that the general public may legally use. Where a private property owner allows public parking, its use may be limited to times that the owner establishes.

Private Parking is defined as parking that is reserved for a specific use or business. Private parking is not available for public parking, and therefore, it must be clearly signed for the allowed users. An example is the Carroll Courts building, which is a public building located on the southeast corner of Carroll Boulevard and Hickory Street, but only its employees and customers may use the adjacent parking, not the customers of surrounding buildings.
Exhibit 3.3 shows the relationship of the types of current public and private parking spaces by zone to selected major downtown land uses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DTIP Parking Zones</th>
<th>Public Parking</th>
<th>Total Public Parking</th>
<th>Private Parking</th>
<th>Total Parking</th>
<th>Sample of Existing Land Uses by DTIP Zone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In Lots</td>
<td>On-Street</td>
<td>In Lots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone #1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>524 NorthStar Bank Day Break (Senior Care Offices)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zone #2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>485 Campus Theatre City Hall West St. Andrew Presbyterian Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zone #3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>559 Carroll Courts Building DATCU Credit Union Bayless-Selby House/Museums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone #4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>129 B&amp;O Towing James Wood Used Cars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone #5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>330 Courthouse on the Square Wells Fargo Bank Hickory Street Office Building Fine Arts Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone #6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>179 Sweetwater Hannah’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone #7</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>800 Main City Hall Civic Center Quakertown Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone #8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>526 Weldon's Western Wear Melrose Apartments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zone #9</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>593 Denton Record-Chronicle Industrial St. Restaurants/Clubs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zone #10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>436 City Hall East Monroe-Pearson Warehouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zone #11</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>340 DCTA Transit Center Center for the Visual Arts Trinity Industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAND TOTALS</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>1,415</td>
<td>3,486</td>
<td>4,901 Percentage of Grand Total (Public vs. Private)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parking Assessment
Exhibit 3.3
D. Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Assessment

Study-area parks, recreation, and open space land uses were inventoried and analyzed to determine if parks and green space are adequate for existing and future downtown development.

Quakertown Park

Exhibit 3.4 shows the locations of downtown parks and open space. Quakertown Park, the largest park in the study area, provides 32 acres of active park space and accommodates many of Denton’s major special events. This park surrounds the Denton Civic Center on three sides and extends northward to Withers Street, the northern boundary of the downtown study area.
Quakertown Park amenities include:

- Amphitheater
- Benches
- Bridges
- Civic Center
- Drinking fountain
- Grills
- Pavilion
- Picnic tables
- Playground
- Pool
- Restrooms
- Lighting

Courthouse Square
The next largest downtown green space is the Courthouse Square. This green space surrounds the Courthouse building, is the site of many local community gatherings, and is well utilized, according to the stakeholder interviews. Weekly concerts are held on the grass in warm weather along with other recreational activities. This grass lawn, serves as a gathering and meeting place for residents and provides relief from the built urban environment downtown.

Tree Groves
Four existing groves of trees provide undeveloped open space in the study area. One is located in the northwestern part of the study area on Parkway Street; the second is located east of the Courthouse on Oak Street; the third is located southeast of the Courthouse on Locust Street; and the fourth is located southwest of Bell Avenue and Mulberry Street. All four of these open space parcels are privately owned and underutilized; they may be candidates for public recreation and open space that could improve the quality of life downtown. A number of church lawns downtown, although generally small, augment its open space. The St. Andrew Church lawn is a notable example.

Historical Park
The Historical Park of Denton County, which is owned by the county, is located on Mulberry Street near Carroll Boulevard. This site includes the Bayless-Selby House Museum and the Denton County African-American Museum, plus three other buildings awaiting renovation. It also includes a gazebo and park benches. A county-owned parking lot located on Carroll Boulevard adjacent to this park hosts the local farmers market, which operates from June through September on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.
Street Trees
The city completed streetscape improvements for Cedar Street in 2006. These street improvements include: new street trees, street corner planters with flowering material and special pavers in pedestrian sidewalks. These streetscape improvements enhance the pedestrian experience and the overall downtown environment.

Traditionally, open space is very valuable and highly desirable in a downtown environment. Studies show that proximity to green space improves property values in urban environments, is psychologically beneficial, and is sustainable. Photograph 3.1 show a number of existing open spaces in downtown Denton. Denton has a number of opportunities to add various park and open space amenities to its downtown, which are further detailed in Chapter 4.
E. Streets and Linkages Assessment

The Downtown Master Plan vision calls for downtown to provide: safe, efficient streets for motorists; safe, pleasant, and wide pedestrian walkways for citizens, shoppers, and tourists; safe, on-street routes for bicyclists; and abundant, on-street parking. The existing street network does not measure up to the vision. Downtown exhibits a number of conflicts involving these parking, streetscape appearance, and walkability goals. The DTIP strives to achieve the vision, balancing the needs of motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists in a mutually-beneficial downtown environment.
Downtown’s street pattern has developed with an automobile dominance over the last 40 years. Exhibit 3.5 shows the hierarchy of the existing street network. Two primary streets, Bell Avenue and Carroll Boulevard, move traffic in a north-south direction. They bracket the east and west sides of the core of downtown and link Denton to the rest of the region. Hickory Street is the east-west connection between the Courthouse Square and the future DCTA transit center. Hickory Street is programmed to become the “Grand Street” downtown. Secondary and tertiary streets provide local access. The following listings detail the street network.

**Primary Streets**

- Bell Avenue is a two-way, four-lane-wide street, accommodating north-south movement.
- Carroll Boulevard is a two-way six-lane-wide street, accommodating north-south movement.

**Secondary Streets**

- McKinney Street is a two-way, four-lane-wide street, accommodating east-west movement.
- Oak Street changes from one-way to two-way and is a two-lane-wide street, accommodating east-west movement.
- Hickory Street changes from one-way to two-way and from two lanes to three lanes in width, accommodating east-west movement.
- Elm Street is a one-way, two-lane-wide street, accommodating southbound traffic flow.
- Locust Street is a one-way, two-lane-wide street, accommodating northbound traffic flow.

**Tertiary Streets**

With the exception of Railroad Street, which is one-way, these streets are each two lanes wide and allow for two-way directional traffic flow.

- Mulberry Street
- Sycamore Street
- Walnut Street
- Railroad Avenue
- Exposition Street
- Industrial Street
- Bolivar Street
- Cedar Street
- Pecan Street
- Parkway Street
- Austin Street
Figure 3.6 shows the core area of Denton's Roadway Mobility Plan.

The existing sidewalk system includes the following approximate linear feet of different-width sidewalk treatments, lengths of roadway without parallel sidewalks, and intersection treatments, based on field-verified GIS data:

- Sidewalks with streetscape: 12,700 linear feet
- Sidewalks - wide: 9,000 linear feet
- Sidewalks - narrow: 77,800 linear feet
- No sidewalks: 37,600 linear feet
- Intersection crosswalks with treatment: seven out of a total of 48

Through an understanding of the current Denton Mobility Roadway Plan it is apparent that downtown streets and arterials are established under suburban design criteria. This is not the desired solution for downtown to achieve its goals. Downtown needs to have a set of street and design standards that are urban with multi-modal functions that support active street land uses. With this defined, the DTIP is recommending a comprehensive change of the Mobility Roadway Plan for downtown.
F. Solid Waste Assessment

Downtown Denton contains one of the true, historic town squares in North Texas, which are characterized by richly detailed buildings, comfortable pedestrian sidewalks, and streets that are enjoyable to drive. One item that detracts from this image is the random placement of large, unsightly solid waste containers, which are emptied by trash trucks fitted with lifts for dumping the trash. Downtown Denton currently exhibits a broad array of trash removal decisions, including the placement of these solid waste containers on its through streets.
All cities and downtowns across Texas have to manage solid waste and its removal. Many different methods, systems, and processes are available to address this issue. Each community needs to determine its desired goals to formulate a suitable solid waste strategy, including recovering recyclable materials. The DTIP provides a recommended strategy to provide a simple set of solutions that will benefit all users.

Exhibit 3.7 shows the locations of solid waste containers in downtown. The highest concentration of such units is located immediately off the Courthouse Square on Cedar, Walnut, Austin, and Pecan streets. The Denton Solid Waste Department furnished the following information about solid waste removal downtown:

- The study area includes a total of approximately 111 solid waste containers.
- A total of 1,067 cubic yards of solid waste is collected from the study area each week.
- Most solid waste containers are front loaded.

The study area contains two different districts, which have different trash needs:

- The Square District
- The Downtown District

In addition, the city’s Solid Waste Department surveyed the community in 2008 for its views on solid waste removal and secured the following notable findings:

- 89% of merchants are willing to change the way trash is collected and to remove solid waste receptacles from streets.
- 46% are willing to take trash as far as a block away from their business.
- 96% would take advantage of on-site recycling.

A number of concerns involving solid waste containers were raised during the project’s public involvement activities, including:

- Image
- Odor
- Loss of parking
- Number of containers
- Location of containers
- Small number of recycling containers
- Economic development loss
Two North Texas communities similar in size to Denton, McKinney and Rockwall, were contacted to see what guidance their solid waste removal processes might offer Denton. The findings of these contacts are described below:

**McKinney, TX**

Businesses in the downtown McKinney business district contact IESI, a solid waste removal company, to establish a commercial “downtown” account for curbside garbage and recycling collection Monday thru Friday. These accounts also include access at any time of the day or night on any day of the week to the city-provided commercial trash receptacles located at the corner of State Highway 5 and Cloud Street, as well as to the trash receptacles located in the MEDC parking lot adjacent to the police substation. A combination of bags, hand-carts, and trash receptacles are used to manage downtown McKinney’s solid waste.

**Rockwall, TX**

Downtown Rockwall merchants have trash picked up either in front of their business or from a separately-placed trash receptacle, depending on their individual contract with Allied, the solid waste vendor serving downtown Rockwall. The City of Rockwall does not handle trash service in the downtown area at this time.

The following list of six options for downtown was developed based on the above-described findings. Chapter 4 includes recommendations for a preferred approach from among these options.

1. **Bags**

   **Opportunities:**
   - Bags provide convenience for business owners
   - Payment is based on need
   - Bags eliminate the need for solid waste containers
   - Least expense for facilities

   **Constraints:**
   - Visual problems
   - Increased service requirements
   - High man-hours
2. Hand Carts

Opportunities:
- Ease of use
- Payment is based on need
- Hand carts eliminate the need for solid waste containers

Constraints:
- Location and storage issues
- Increased service requirements
- Hand carts only accommodate a small volume of trash

3. Side-Loaded Containers

Opportunities:
- These containers allow for large volumes of trash
- These containers can be screened
- Businesses do not have to store these containers or trash
- These containers fit square to buildings and walls

Constraints:
- These are not the largest type of solid waste container
- Screens for these containers are a slight challenge

4. Front-Loaded Containers

Opportunities:
- These containers accommodate the largest volumes of trash
- These containers can be screened
- Businesses do not have to store these containers or trash

Constraints:
- These containers will be difficult to screen near the Square
- These containers will pre-empt parking spaces
- These are the largest containers to screen

5. Large Compactors

Opportunities:
- Compactors accommodate the largest volume of trash
- Compactors can be screened
Constraints:
• High cost
• Safety concerns

6. Enclosures

Opportunities:
• Enclosures screen solid waste receptacles from view
• Enclosures enhance the view from the street

Constraints:
• Enclosures slow down collection
• Enclosures involve a cost to build
G. Architectural Design Assessment

Downtown Denton has a variety of wonderful architecture. Much of this historic fabric defines the area and its history, which connects the past to the present. The existing pattern of sheets, railroad tracts and buildings establishes the future design for growth.

The original township lots for Denton were auctioned off in January 1857, when downtown was being planned as the heart of the city. The creation of the original central courthouse “square” established the town planning pattern, linking county leadership and government. Denton added the special significance of siting the square and courthouse on a hill, completing the current majestic Courthouse in 1896. Denton’s Courthouse Square is a valuable resource for the DTIP.

The assessment of downtown Denton’s architecture is based on site reconnaissance, which included a photographic field inventory. Key findings include the following:

- The Denton County Courthouse is the jewel of downtown.
- Downtown contains a significant number of quality masonry buildings, exhibiting a range of building periods and a depth and breadth of architectural styles.
- Many blocks contain unified building facades.
- A number of landmark buildings are important to downtown, including:
  
  Campus Theatre  
  City Hall West  
  The Bank Building  
  Scripture Building  
  Wright Opera House  
  First United Methodist Church