Downtown Recommendations - Land Based

This chapter presents the recommendations for land use, including parks and open space, and for design guidelines for downtown Denton; and it includes the key findings that have led to the recommendations. The recommendations are founded on the vision and thoughtful insights of both the public and private sector. Additionally, the recommendations take into consideration the Downtown Master Plan, public involvement results, and existing conditions. These recommendations provide the foundation for the DTIP’s implementation strategies.
A. Form Based Code (Future Land Use)

Purpose and Intent

Form Based Codes (FBCs) are distinctly different from typical zoning ordinances and standards (often called Euclidean zoning). FBCs focus on creating functional, attractive, and economically-successful neighborhoods and commercial areas by creating a more predictable outcome of physical development. Nevertheless, they can easily be adopted within a typical zoning or development ordinance. FBCs work very much like a Planned Development (PD) district, where key standards are incorporated into the creation of the PD districts.
FBC districts are the result of broad public-private cooperation where roadways, sidewalks, transit, and bicycle access work together to make pedestrian-friendly environments attractive to retailers, employers, and the rapidly-expanding demographic categories of young professionals and retirees. These types of districts, which have been created elsewhere in the region and the country, have proven to increase property values and be more recession-proof than development that does not include an FBC development approach.

FBCs offer a number of advantages. The standards are high, but if met, development can be achieved with minimal time delay. In fact, urban-style projects, which could take up to two and a half years to gain approvals and variances for downtown conditions using typical zoning procedures, have been achieved in a much shorter time and with a much more desirable outcome for the public, the district, and the developer in most cities using FBCs.

The overall objective is to create buildings, streets, and public spaces that, over time, have the versatility to be reused. A built environment that can readily accommodate reinvestment eliminates the need for demolition and reconstruction every 25 to 40 years.

**Priority Recommendations:**

A1: Formally adopt DTIP

A2: Formally adopt the Form Based Code

- A3: Create a new zoning district in the Denton Development Code called “Downtown District”

**Link to Downtown Implementation Plan:** FBC is an important tool needed to implement the vision and goals for downtown Denton. It facilitates realizing the DTIP recommendations by setting standards and developing policy language for elements, such as building form, parking, open space, architectural elements and streetscape.

The FBC is a stand-alone document that will replace the existing zoning for downtown. The easiest way to fit the FBC into the Denton Development Code (DDC) is to create a new zoning district, called “Downtown District” which to include all of the FBC text. Such a new DDC zoning district is equivalent to establishing a PD district in the DDC. All of the standards and intent statements
in the Downtown (Zoning) District will govern where any conflicts may arise with other DDC provisions. Exhibit 4.0 shows the framework plan which defines future land uses for downtown Denton, which will be implemented with an FBC district:

**District Goals:** The codes and zoning ordinance for downtown will reflect the following principles, which are inherent in the FBC.

**Block Face:** Buildings should be constructed adjacent to the sidewalk, with parking behind the main façade of the building in order to provide the block with a sense of enclosure and to enhance the pedestrian experience. (See Exhibit 4.1)

**Street Design:** Street design should reflect the dual concept of the street as both vehicular thoroughfare and civic space. Streets should be designed for the shared use of pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles.

Sidewalks should have continuous shade for the comfort of pedestrians. Other paved surfaces, such as parking areas and off-street parking lots, should also be shaded or have tree canopy to reduce the heat-island effect on people and buildings.

**Retail at Grade:** Street-level retail construction should have a ceiling height providing flexibility for a wide variety of retail and restaurant uses. In addition, windows along the street face will support those commercial activities as well as enliven the sidewalk experience. (See Photograph 4.2.)

**Residential at Grade:** Residential units, which are located on or near grade, should engage the sidewalk with entries and windows facing the street. This engagement provides sidewalk users with a sense of security and gives residents a sense of “ownership of the sidewalk.” However, demarcating the private realm from the public realm is key; elevational change or low fencing can accomplish this objective. (See Photograph 4.3.)

**Building Form:** Downtown Denton has an outstanding stock of historic buildings. New buildings should not be required to match the historic style identically, but they should respect the historic tradition with a distinct base, middle, and top (often called tri-partite architecture, as seen in Exhibit 4.2). In addition, corners and street or walkway termini present opportunities for landmark features on buildings.
Building Height: New buildings should be at least two stories in height and a maximum of four stories, with two exceptions. Proximity to the DCTA transit center (the TOD Area) and to Quakertown Park (the Residential Area) are locations that could benefit from greater height for density and views without impacting visibility of the Courthouse from primary approaches into downtown. The height in these areas should not exceed seven stories.

Building Materials: Materials should be durable and age well, especially those at grade, which are subject to high contact.

Parking: Large land areas used exclusively for parking for separate uses is a waste of resources and diminishes economic activity. Shared use of parking should be encouraged. In addition, parking standards for retail, restaurant, and office uses should be modified to allow the interchangeability of mixed uses without triggering a requirement for additional parking.

Bicycle Accommodation: Adequate bicycle parking should be provided throughout downtown to encourage bicycling. (See Photograph 4.3.)

Sign Standards: Signage standards need to be included that are suitable for urban mixed-use districts and responsive to the needs of successful retail and restaurant activity.

Land Use: Residential, retail, and office uses should be permitted throughout downtown so that Denton is able to respond to changing market dynamics.

Procedures: The FBC-established process is important to the success of attracting high-quality development and investment. The process should blend speed of staff review and approval of properly-designed projects with the input of a third-party Urban Design Officer, who is familiar with urban mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development. This independent professional can both advise the city and work with the developer to ensure that development will contribute to the vision for downtown Denton.
B. Parks and Open Space

Parks and open space are the livability elements that support a high quality of life in downtown. Existing downtown park and open space features were assessed and were determined to be of average-to-above-average quality and quantity for downtown’s current, limited number of residents. Exhibit 4.3 shows these features along with recommendations for improvements. Additional resources will need to be provided as future downtown growth occurs near Quakertown Park and the proposed DCTA transit center.
Photographs 4.4 and 4.5 show examples of park open space and Jazz Fest at Quakertown Park. Components of the existing and future park and open space network include:

**Urban Open Space**
- Pocket Park / Venue
- Pedestrian Sidewalk
- Street Music Venue

**Neighborhood Components**
- Denton Courthouse Square
- Neighborhood Park
- Pedestrian Trails
- Bicycle Network

**Regional**
- Quakertown Park
- Multi-Purpose Venue

In addition, Denton should leverage its unique local history of music and arts and the current music and art programs with UNT, TWU, and DISD to establish a downtown entertainment series, using:

**Small Outdoor Venues**
- Pocket Park / Venue
- Pedestrian Sidewalk
- Street Music Venue

**Large Outdoor Venues**
- Quakertown Park
- Significant Streets
- Expanded ROW
- Pavilions
- Band Shell

**Priority Recommendations:**

C1: Create a series of Urban Spaces - pocket parks, neighborhood parks, and wide pedestrian sidewalks

C2: Create Music and Fine Art Spaces

C3: Implement Quakertown Park Master Plan
Quakertown Park

A Jewel of a Resource
Great downtowns include an exceptional park as an open-space green amenity. Quakertown Park fills that need for downtown Denton. Quakertown Park's trees, water features, and quality civic buildings provide an outstanding set of natural and manmade resources. Both downtown stakeholders and Denton citizens use Quakertown Park.

Revised Master Plan
The master plan for Quakertown Park was revised as part of this DTIP to reinforce recommendations supporting downtown’s projected growth. The revised master plan was developed with input from Denton’s Parks and Recreation Department staff during a day-
long work session conducted at the Civic Center and several of additional meetings. The revised master plan divides the park into several zones, each of which is focused on a specific user group. Several zones within Quakertown Park serve multiple functions. (See Exhibit 4.4)

Goals and program elements were established to guide future design changes in the park. The most significant recommendation involves removing the northern creek because it is a barrier between east and west amenities. This short run of the creek can be placed in a box structure and covered with earth. Also, the southern creek needs to be naturalized by removing the existing concrete channel for its full length through the park.

The following set of recommendations summarize the changes:

**Park Goals**

1. Increase connectivity between the park and downtown.
2. Enhance landscaped green-space in the park.
3. Create new vistas within the park.
4. Use water features in the park to reduce downtown flooding.
5. Increase parking without adding any additional hard surface.
6. Establish a more secure environment in the park.
7. Provide quality landscaped park edges (perimeter treatment).
8. Provide a permanent performance venue.
9. Upgrade the infrastructure for the festival components of the park.
10. Promote the park as downtown’s “Central Park,” the city's signature park.
11. Provide for citizens’ year-round recreational needs.
12. Celebrate the legacy of architect O’Neil Ford, who designed City Hall, Emiliy Fowler Library, and the Civic Center.
13. Increase park users’ enjoyment of water in the park.
14. Provide opportunities to recycle specific waste (plastic bottles and aluminum cans).
Park Program Elements

- Heritage tree preservation
- Pedestrian trail network
- Amphitheater
- Large-group pavilion
- Upgraded kids playground
- Spray water play feature
- Gateway and park portal entry features
- Landscaped perimeter treatment
- Landscaping and softening of existing parking lots
- Lake water feature (to lessen downtown flooding and to provide an important pedestrian amenity with a hard edge on one side)
- Large civic space for gatherings
- Passive recreation space
- Public restroom facility
- Infrastructure upgrades (power, lighting, water, and sewer)
Lakefront

The Lakefront zone brings the Civic Center and Senior Center areas together into one area focused on a new lake amenity, which will help to reduce downstream flooding. This lake will include a hard edge around the lake and a park structure for small performances. Photographs 4.6 shows examples of proposed lakefront development.

Potential future design modifications for this area:
- Lake water feature
- Passive recreation space
- Large civic space for gatherings
- Landscaping and softening existing parking lots

Library

The Library zone should better support the Emily Fowler library functions and offer outdoor learning environments. Naturalizing the stream channel to the south of the library will make proposed pedestrian seating and overlooks more appealing, and will provide sustainable solutions. Photographs 4.7 shows existing and proposed examples.

Potential future design modifications for this area:
- Passive recreation space
- Landscaping and softening existing parking lots
Garden/Performance

The Garden/Performance zone provides a quiet garden environment and it also functions as a “music in the trees” setting during large festivals. Photographs 4.8 shows examples of garden/performance environments.

Potential future design modifications for this area:
- Passive recreation space
- Large civic space for gatherings

Park and Perimeter Edge

Several park and perimeter zone treatments may be incorporated into Quakertown Park. Photograph 4.9 shows different park and perimeter treatments.

Not all programmatic elements are contained in a single zone or a group of zones. The following Quakertown Park zones will include each of the listed program elements:
- Heritage trees preservation
- Pedestrian trail network
- Gateway / signage features
- Park portal entry features for pedestrians
- Landscaped perimeter treatment
- Infrastructure upgrades
- Required ADA modifications
Pavilion/Performance

The Pavilion/Performance zone includes the lawn that is created by enclosing the northern creek in a box structure to better accommodate east west movement in the park. A new pavilion is proposed for the lawn to provide additional venues for family events and smaller gatherings. Photographs 4.10 shows examples of pavilion/performance venues.

Potential future design modifications for this area:
- Large-group pavilion
- Spray water play feature
- Passive recreation space
- Public restroom facility (amphitheater or pavilion)

Passive

A soft, green landscape is the predominant environment for the Passive zone. Photographs 4.11 shows examples of typical passive park spaces. This zone can also support an improved set of children’s play structures, for residents.

Potential future design modifications for this area:
- Passive recreation space
- Upgraded kids playground
Amphitheater/Performance

The Quakertown Park Concept Plan creates the location for a large civic amphitheater in the current location of the municipal pool. The swimming pool is challenged with growing maintenance issues. Use of the pool will continue to decline as family neighborhoods increase in locations away from downtown. A community focused amphitheater venue for festivals and music events is proposed as a replacement.

The amphitheater will need to be designed to function well for a large crowd and also as a park element offering shade during non-performance times. Photographs 4.12 show examples of amphitheater/performance environments. The facility will need to accommodate ticket sales, audio and electric needs, performance lighting and security. This overall zone should also include the future development of a public restroom facility for park patrons.

Potential future design modifications for this area:
• Amphitheater
• Large civic space
• Public restroom facility (amphitheater or pavilion)
• Landscaping and softening existing parking lots

• The suggestion of removing and replacing the pool from Quakertown Park was a topic of much discussion during our design review.
• The only way we could consider converting the pool to an amphitheater would be to fund the construction of a new pool, close to the existing site or in the southeast section of town.
• We would not consider permanently closing the Civic Center Pool without first constructing a suitable replacement that would serve as an affordable aquatic option.
The Civic Edge park zone has the greatest direct connection with downtown. Making this zone attractive with easy access to Quakertown Park is important to future adjacent residential uses. This zone includes a proposed park portal feature which will increase pedestrian connectivity; the crosswalk linkage to downtown will require signalization. Photographs 4.13 show the typical type of settings that will be designed for this zone.

The Quakertown Park Concept Plan recommends the removal of the existing Denton County office building. The building is small in size and viewed as inappropriate for the park environment. Downtown will benefit from the expanded green edge across McKinney Street from new mid-rise residential and mixed use development. The recovered landscaped park will support pedestrian walkways, public art, benches and, potentially, a future dog park for residents.

Potential future design modifications for this area:
- Landscaping and softening existing parking lots
- Accommodating passive recreation space
C. Architectural Design Guidelines

A wide range of architectural styles can coexist in downtown. A list of contributing downtown buildings and architectural elements has been defined as part of the DTIP to be used along with the FBC to guide the design of new buildings in downtown.

Photographs 4.14 and 4.15 show the range of downtown buildings that create a palette of contributing architecture. These buildings exhibit a quality of design, use of materials, relationship of place, pedestrian linkage connections, and a supportive public realm that warrants their inclusion. Photographs 4.16 highlights downtown architectural elements that reinforce the contributing characteristics of downtown buildings.
Priority Recommendations:

D1: Formally adopt DTIP report which defines: Quality, Place, Environmental Design elements

D2: Establish LEED rating goal for all new development

D3: Submit DTIP for LEED neighborhood certification

D4: Follow Tri-partite architecture proportions

Downtown Architectural Components

The following listing outlines the components that need to be reviewed to achieve quality architecture in downtown. These components and relevant recommendations, many of which are communicated through images and photographs, set the tone for design, place making, and the relationship to the public realm appropriate for the development of downtown.

Contributing Architecture in Downtown Photograph 4.15
Contributing Architecture Elements for Downtown Denton

Photograph 4.16

1. Quality
   - Design
   - Materials
   - Proportions

2. Definition of Place
   - History
   - Culture
   - People

3. Sustainable
   - Buildings
   - Neighborhood (Downtown)

4. Traditional vs. Modern
   - Style
   - Characteristics

5. Safety through Environmental Design
   - Windows
   - Access and Views
1. Quality

**Finding** – Downtown contains a significant amount of quality architecture. New construction needs to build and add to the quality of existing architecture, primarily through three different measures of defining quality, namely: design, materials, and proportions. Quality architecture is based on excellent design produced by an architect using quality (durable) materials working and detailing with proper proportions.

**Recommendation** – Any materials local to Denton that create durable, high-quality buildings may be used, rather than limiting new construction to a specific list of materials. Architects working in downtown need to follow correct proportions for building facades. The architectural elevation in Exhibit 4.5 and 4.6 are marked to show how several of Denton’s downtown buildings display the correct use of the three quality measures of design, materials, and proportions.

2. Definition of Place

**Finding** – Denton and North Texas provide an environment which celebrates places. Many downtowns are weekend retreats for shoppers who are seeking a unique experience. Architecture can support these activities making downtown Denton a marketable destination.
Recommendation – Removing fake facades that are not architecturally correct will help establish downtown Denton as a truly special and memorable place. Some existing building facades harm downtown’s image in several ways:

1. Façades that are “slipcovered” and hide the original façade, which better defines the integrity of the building.
2. Façades that lack scale and that are constructed of poor quality materials.
3. Facades that lack windows that define scale, height, and proportion. Blank walls are a poor choice for all downtown buildings.

3. Sustainable

Finding – If the built environment is more sustainable, downtown Denton can generate more economic development and improving the long-term environment.

LEED is an internationally recognized green building certification system, providing third-party verification that a building or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at improving performance across all the metrics that matter most: energy savings, water efficiency, CO2 emissions reduction, improved
indoor environmental quality, and stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts. LEED, which the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) developed, provides building owners and operators a concise framework for identifying and implementing practical and measurable green building design, construction, operations, and maintenance solutions. Sustainable building strategies should be considered early in the development cycle. LEED is flexible enough to apply to all building types, commercial, as well as residential. It works throughout the building lifecycle from design and construction through operations and maintenance, tenant fit out, and significant retrofit.

In addition, LEED for Neighborhood Development extends the benefits of LEED beyond the building footprint into the neighborhood it serves. LEED for Neighborhood Development is a collaboration among USGBC, Congress for the New Urbanism, and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

**Recommendation** – All new downtown buildings should be LEED-certified. (See the Exhibit 4.7 LEED certification symbol.) The city should work with downtown property owners, local developers, Denton County, and DCTA to define the desired level of LEED certification.

**Buildings**

LEED-certified buildings are located and designed to:

- Lower operating costs and increase asset value.
- Reduce waste sent to landfills.
- Conserve energy and water.
- Be healthier and safer for occupants.
- Reduce harmful greenhouse gas emissions.
- Qualify for tax rebates, zoning allowances, and other incentives in hundreds of cities.
- Demonstrate an owner’s commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility

**Neighborhood (Downtown)**

**Recommendation** – The DTIP should be submitted for USBCG LEED certification once the city adopts the DTIP, which was developed to be in conformance with LEED principals and guidelines. The LEED for Neighborhood Development Rating System integrates the principles of smart growth, urbanism, and green buildings into the first national system for neighborhood design.
4. Traditional vs. Modern

Finding – Modern architecture, like traditional architecture, exhibits both good and bad design examples. Downtown has more good-quality traditional building stock than good-quality modern structures. Many of downtown’s modern buildings break basic design principles. They use poor quality materials; they do not follow tri-partite architecture (distinct base, middle, and top); and they fail to use proper proportions. Photograph 4.17 shows some non-contributing façade treatments.

The following buildings of modern design in downtown Denton are excellent buildings to serve as role models for future development:

- Main Fire Station Expansion
- Denton City Hall
- Civic Center

Recommendation – Downtown buildings should be of either traditional or modern design, reflecting in either case, the three basic areas of quality: design, materials, and proportions.

5. Safety through Environmental Design

Finding – Many times, crime occurs in environments that more easily support illegal behavior, such as in poorly lighted areas, areas where views are blocked, or areas on dead-end streets. Downtown Denton, like most downtowns, currently has some of these unsafe environments, based on careful observation, that need improvement.

Recommendation – Denton and a downtown parking authority should develop a program to review sites, and mitigate environmental safety design. These corrections may include: improving parking lot lighting; replacing lamps in light fixtures in a timely fashion; requiring pruning of landscape material to increase sight lines; and improving pedestrian lighting along streets and sidewalks.
TOD Overview

The City of Denton and Denton County Transportation Authority are working to create an intermodal transportation center serving Downtown Denton.

In order to plan for future transit supportive development in the Downtown Transit Center area, the City of Denton has begun a planning process, to understand the impacts of new transit service on current and future development. The resulting “Transit Oriented Development” (TOD) plan provided the infrastructure and open space framework and building typologies for a new mixed-use transit community of sustainable development. This plan and study was completed for the City in the Fall 2009.

The study area includes approximately 38 acres within a one-fourth-mile radius of the station location. The one-fourth-mile represents the ideal walking distance to transit and the general influence area of transit on a walkable development. Proposed land uses in the area include expansion of public services, higher density residential, retail, and office uses.

Sustainability

The TOD plan was developed to be consistent with the elements of sustainability as defined by the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) in their Development Excellence program.

These ten (10) principles provide a guide for private and public development in and around the new transit center. Energy use and resource efficiency of the new pattern of development is important. The sustainable elements include the following:

1. Development Options  
2. Efficient Growth  
3. Pedestrian Design  
4. Housing Choice  
5. Activity Centers  
6. Environmental Stewardship  
7. Quality Places  
8. Transportation Efficiency  
9. Resource Efficiency  
10. Implementation

Transit Oriented Development Framework

Transit can do more than improve accessibility. Transit is a tool that can encourage economic development, serve as a catalyst for urban renewal, and create a sense of place. Access to transit can support the building of sustainable environments where people
can live, work and play. Transit oriented development (TOD) is about creating opportunity for businesses and residents. Capitalizing on these opportunities requires a broad vision that supports the community’s strengths and weaknesses, and a financial and implementation plans which responds to the community’s needs.

Transit oriented development is an approach to land use and development that relies on design and land use practices typically found in older central cities. These design practices include a mix of land uses (residential, retail, office and public service), a well connected street grid, a well defined pedestrian environment and proximity to transit.

The City benefits when increased property values translate to higher tax revenues, and the community profits from new investment.

**Transit Oriented Development Framework**

The proposed land uses in the Downtown Station area are a mix of residential and commercial uses intended to complement the Hickory Street Corridor and Downtown redevelopment.

Building height, massing, parking requirements and other elements will determine location and orientation of related building types. A key land use is mixed use, which is the vertical organization of two or more land uses into one multi-story building. Additional examples of the preferred future land uses and related infrastructure are illustrated in the TOD land use concept plan.