



Chapter 7

Tall City Central District Plan



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Tall City Central District Plan

A Big Heart: Toward a Living City Center

INTRODUCTION

Downtown is the basis for Midland's identity as the Tall City. In 1929, when Midland had yet to reach a population of 5,500 people, T.S. Hogan opened his 12-story skyscraper, the Petroleum Building, the tallest building between Fort Worth and El Paso. Opened in the face of the Great Depression, the building expressed a civic aspiration, a drive to build something big and important in the middle of the Permian Basin. But the Petroleum Building, with its spires and stonework and the adjacent Yucca Theater, aimed higher than mere feet above ground. In 1928, Hogan the builder told the Midland Reporter, "It is not enough to offer prospective citizens brick and stone. The spirit too must be fed. It must be surrounded by beauty."

In subsequent decades, the core of Midland represented in steel, brick, stone, and glass the economic cycles of the city – periods of major construction as oil boomed, during the 1950s and 1960s, the 1980s, and most recently the rapid growth of the last ten years. These periods of rapid growth were largely focused around office development, satisfying for the voracious demand for space created by the energy and financial industries. These cycles of growth have generated a building inventory and skyline unusual even for a city of a much larger population. Downtown Midland over the years has developed and sustained itself as a major presence on the plains.

Around the country, downtowns in cities of all sizes have experienced a rebirth. The most successful of these have established themselves as "places" as well as "presences" – places that attract people to live and to experience, as well as to work. The last thirty years has seen a reintroduction of types of uses and activities to city centers that had previously moved away – housing, shopping, entertainment, eating and drinking – and these uses interact with one another to create a new sense of city life. Opinion surveys and market results have demonstrated the affinity that younger generations have for city life. Geoffrey Webb, a theoretical physicist who has turned his attention to understanding the unifying principles of cities has succinctly described good city planning as "maximizing interaction, minimizing distress." This measurement describes active and safe city centers and provides a prism through which we view central districts. Most importantly, though, high functioning centers also encourage and attract innovation, becoming in the words of British architect Peter Cook a "garden for ideas."

By and large, Midlanders do not believe that Downtown, despite its millions of dollars of high quality capital investment, functions as successfully as it could in this way. New residents have moved to the city from other Texas cities and parts of the country with strong, multiple use downtowns and those residents long for Midland to have this same kind of vitality at the center. Longtime residents have seen other places as well and want to bring the lessons of those cities back home, while imbuing them the unique character of the Basin and its people. Downtown is very important to Midlanders of all ages, and in general, people know what they want. However, it has proven more difficult to put these new aspirations, rooted in the spirit of T.S. Hogan, into operation. The purpose of this chapter is to channel these hopes of a downtown that is a place, as well as a presence, into actionable recommendations that will, over time, generate the type of city center that Midland wants and deserves.

DOWNTOWN ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

First, it is important to define what we mean when we talk about “downtown” and “city center.” The term “downtown” as used in Midland generally describes the area with the greatest concentration of multi-story buildings – the “tall” in the Tall City. On a map, much of this area is reflected by the original street grid, where streets run in true ordinal directions: north, south, east and west. This dense core is more or less defined by A Street on the west, Main Street on the east, Missouri Avenue on the south, and Kansas Avenue on the north. The crossroads of its two defining streets is the intersection of Big Spring and Wall. But a broader area, extending north to Cuthbert Avenue, south to Front Street and the Union Pacific line, and east to Lamesa Road, is also part of downtown, and frames the high-intensity office core.

In Midland, the center or heart of the city goes even farther. The confluence of Garfield Street, Illinois Avenue, and Andrews Highway is a major concentration of activity one mile west of the traditional crossroads intersection, and includes Midland Memorial Hospital, and a variety of both big and small retailers. This activity focus has been branded (not altogether successfully) as “Old Town” or the “Village.” While the physical environment does not necessarily reflect these names, they do suggest an appreciation for the area’s relatively smaller, potentially more intimate scale, and its openness as a setting for small business and innovation.

These two nodes are connected by mixed use corridors and surrounding residential areas that reflect the first eras of Midland’s major growth. In addition to the area’s neighborhood integrity and walking distance access to major employment and commercial cluster, streets like Wall Street and Texas Avenue host a variety of office and civic uses and have a demonstrable quality as pedestrian avenues. This connecting corridor also mixes many of Midland’s cultural, educational, and historical assets – the Museum of the Southwest, the Marion Blakemore Planetarium, the George W. Bush Childhood Home, the Fredda Turner Durham Children’s Museum, and the Halley Library and Museum.



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DISCUSSION PAGE:**

“I like the idea of re-vamping downtown Midland. I think if there was more stuff to do, it would be easier to live in Midland.”

– Staci N.

So Midland’s central district may be conceived as two major activity centers, the dense Downtown core surrounded by a lower density “frame” and the Medical Center/Village area, incorporating a major regional hospital and associated offices and major community retailing, connected by a mixed use corridor that includes residential, office, civic, and cultural uses. This district and its immediate surroundings includes most of the essentials of city life – major employment, schools, recreation, churches, shopping, culture and museums, hotels, health care, government and civic life – all close to one another. These are the ingredients of the living city center that Midlanders of all ages want. A somewhat deeper investigation into issues and opportunities will guide us to the strategic actions that can bring these ingredients to life together.



Midland’s Central District

Issues

As noted above, the center of Midland is rich in assets. Its employment concentration in notable buildings give it a distinct big city feel. Its cultural corridor features important institutions within a distinctive residential neighborhood. It includes a major and growing regional hospital, a leading health care center that attracts thousands of visitors. The Village subdistrict provides affordable places for new enterprise. Yet, there are issues that tend to prevent this combination of assets from reaching its full potential. These include:

Separate development focuses that lack synergy. The central district has key development focuses: the office center, the museum cluster along Missouri Avenue, the regional hospital, and retail development at the foot of Andrews Highway. But there is relatively little interaction among and within these focuses. In different situ-

ations, they are divided by heavy traffic, complex intersections, gaps in development between focuses, and large parking lots. In great urban districts, one development focus leads to another, and different centers reinforce each other.

Large amount of surface parking and underused land. Despite a number of parking structures, Downtown Midland has an exceptionally large amount of surface parking. Within Downtown (the core and frame subdistricts) 25% of the total land area (excluding street right-of-ways) is used for surface parking. Other large areas are open or in very low intensity use. These underused lands tend to divide major projects from one another and the central core from its context. For example, parking lots and underused land between Pecos and North A Street divide the core from the corridor and specifically from Midland High School. Similarly, lots in the corridor between Main and Weatherford Streets separate the core from surrounding residential areas. At the other end of the central district, parking lot patterns, while necessary, make it difficult to move from one area to another in what could be a walkable urban district.

Retail scarcity. The Village subdistrict has extensive retail uses, including an 80,000 square foot strip center, two small-box chain pharmacies, small business blocks along Dodson Street and Andrews Highway, and fast-food restaurants. However, retail and restaurant uses, which animate street frontages, are scarce in the Downtown core. Although a few large office buildings in the core have restaurants or limited retail occupants, most do not. Smaller scale retail buildings are scattered throughout the larger Downtown district, but generally do not rise to create mutually reinforcing clusters. Retail space at street level in the new Wall Street Lofts is a welcome change in the single-use land development pattern found in most parts of the central district.

Few evening attractions. The central district in general and the Downtown area in particular lack activities or uses that keep people in the area in evenings. Downtown's restaurants, hotel, convention center, and the Yucca Theater offer some activity after business hours, but fall short of generating the energy found in strong city centers. Cultural features in the corridor subdistrict are closed on most evenings, and most uses in the Village tend to be single purpose businesses that also do not encourage multi-destination visits. Most of Midland's night activity takes place outside these traditional centers around the Loop or near the Sports Complex.

Parking in Downtown Midland



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“I think that re-vamping downtown Midland needs to be done with our history and heritage in mind. We don’t need anything that looks like Austin or Dallas or anywhere else - it should honor Midland’s history and architecture.”

— Jackie W.



**POSTED TO TALL CITY TOMORROW
DISCUSSION PAGE:**

“The city needs to work with
developers to rehab old buildings
and create parking solutions”

– Cory M.

Lack of civic space. Parks and public spaces can be important catalysts for development and community life. Wadley Barron, Hill, and Haley Parks are significant open spaces near the center, but are too far away from the core and too internal to residential neighborhoods to function as central civic parks. Centennial Plaza on the Courthouse/Convention Center block between Main Street, Colorado Street, Wall Street, and Texas Avenue, is the core’s main public space, but is relatively small at about 1.5 acres and formal in design. In addition, the district lacks a larger scale space for events and informal recreation.

Residential inventory. Nationwide, housing has been a key to downtown revitalization, injecting day and night activity into central districts. Downtown’s large employment base and Midland’s demographics create significant residential possibilities. The successful lease-up of Wall Street Lofts at Wall and Main Streets demonstrates the market potential for housing in the city center. However the residential development surrounding the project is not integrated into the Downtown and Village subdistricts.

TALL CITY TOMORROW CENTRAL DISTRICT PLAN

Participants in the planning process recognized the importance of a vital city center to efforts to maintain economic growth and diversification, and to help advance Midland’s overall goal of providing a satisfying and attractive place to live and work for current and future residents. They identified the following goals to achieve this outcome.

GOALS

1. Establish Downtown Midland as a regional destination.

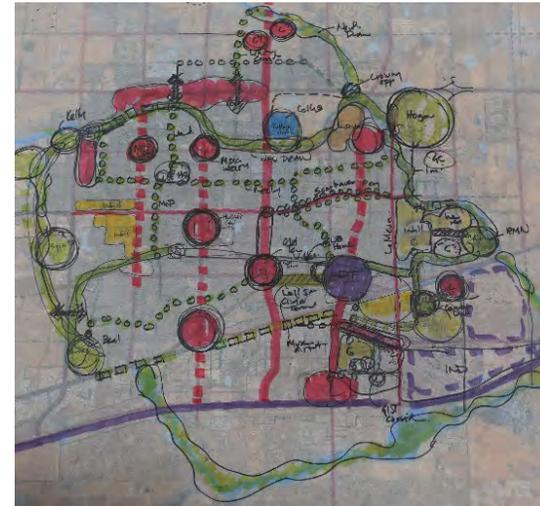
Participants envisioned Midland as a city with a variety of centers, each offering individual features and character, and a relationship to each other and their immediate surroundings. They perceived the Downtown, the Medical Center/Village, and historic district that together make up the heart of the city as separate but related areas. This larger central district should present both individual destinations and a unified and connected center that together define the primary image that the city presents.

2. Create a “cultural core” in Downtown Midland that is a living, working, and entertainment destination.

As part of its mission as an image center, engine for economic growth, and life enhancer for the city’s residents, the central district should become a focus for arts and culture. In some ways, it has accomplished this, through its concentration of museums, the historic Yucca Theater in Downtown, and the possibility of an enhanced civic space at Centennial Plaza. But other facilities, often fundamental to Downtown growth, are located in other parts of Midland or, as in the case of the Wagner Noel Performing Arts Center, in locations that serve the entire Midland-Odessa metropolitan area. However, the central district can use its existing assets and opportunities, like land resources, to create art and culture opportunity centers, including work and sales space.

3. Offer an urban lifestyle in Downtown Midland with quality residential options.

Successful multi-use city centers have become neighborhoods as well as employment, retail, and entertainment centers. Neighborhoods have permanent, around-the-clock residents who claim the area as their personal territory. In doing this, they create a secure and lived-in environment that becomes more comfortable and secure for other people to enjoy – an urban environment that emphasizes positive and mutually reinforcing interaction. Wall Street Lofts, which opened in 2015, has been very well-received by the market and has demonstrated the attraction of high-quality, high-amenity downtown housing. This market has room to grow, but other features, including nearby schools like Midland High, Midland Academy and area churches, create ideal conditions for family housing and other products. Housing can be the glue that binds the city center together.



Early diagram of multi-nucleated Midland

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“I believe that a mix of affordable apartments, affordable dining, and civic-friendly installations like museums, art galleries, and community centers could help revitalize downtown.”

– Owen R.



The future of Downtown and the larger central district also are highly relevant to goals established under the category of Sense of Place and Community Character, which include the following:

- Ensure that Midland's built and natural environments are regionally appropriate and well maintained.
- Identify partnerships to produce neighborhood and commercial centers that are attractive, functional, and of high quality.
- Create vibrant multi-use destinations that support activities and residential settings for multiple generations.
- Encourage the development of places where Midland residents can gather and socialize to build connections.

RECENT PLANS AND PUBLIC ACTIONS

The energy boom of 2012-2015 produced major corporate office construction in both the Downtown core and in other areas, notably in the Highway 191/Deauville Boulevard corridor and the Claydesta office park. But significant efforts to plan and execute more diversified development in the central district have been occurring.

Three particularly important efforts that frame the initiatives proposed by this chapter include:

- The SMART Downtown Plan of 2007
- Wall Street Lofts
- Midland Market Concept
- The Courthouse Site Redevelopment

The following discussion will summarize these major efforts and their relevance to the future of central Midland.

The Smart Downtown Plan

This comprehensive downtown plan concentrated on the core and frame districts, but included a portion of the corridor subdistrict, an area south of the UP tracks to Pennsylvania Avenue, and largely residential areas east to Lamesa Road and north to Cuthbert Avenue. The stated objective of the plan was to “assist the City of Midland and other advocates with the preparation of real-estate strategies and urban planning programs for downtown that will produce tangible results and information leading to careful investment and a well-served market.” The plan included a market analysis of the Downtown trade area, estimating a ten-year demand for about 1.6 million square feet of office space, 320,000 square feet of retail space, and up to 4,000 housing units. Of this total demand, the market analysis assumed a potential Downtown capture rate of 20% for retail space or 120-130,000 square feet; 30% for office space or 475,000 square feet; and a portion of the projected residential demand drawing from rental and attached housing potential.

The Smart Plan used these market projections as inputs to three alternative scenarios. These included:

- » A “Big Bang” scenario, based on the premise that one major executed public project would catalyze development of the surrounding area. This scenario defined redevelopment of the Centennial Plaza/Courthouse site as this catalytic project.
- » A “District” scenario, identifying separate districts around the periphery of downtown, each with an activity focus and ultimately growing together into a revitalized district.
- » A “Corridor” scenario, with new growth directed in a linear format along four types of streets: regional corridors (Front and Big Spring Streets), historic Wall Street, streets with potential pedestrian character (Pecos and Loraine Streets), and a transit loop (a north-south circulator route using Marienfeld, Colorado, Michigan, and Missouri Streets with extensions).

The Smart Plan identified a Final Preferred Plan based largely on the district scenario with street typology elements of the corridor concept. This preferred plan was based on three overall components:

- » A “sustainable centralized downtown area” offering mixed uses and clusters of village and neighborhood-oriented development around the outer boundary of the district.
- » Adjoining park districts to help define neighborhoods and attract people outside of normal business hours, complementing Centennial Plaza.
- » Streets that define character, addressing pedestrian needs and providing street trees and streetscape design consistent with the character of individual districts.

The Preferred Plan established five focus districts:

1. **An Urban Residential Village** on a 9 square block area on the northwest periphery of Downtown, between San Angelo, Marienfeld, Ohio, and Louisiana. The proposed village consists of street defining multifamily residential around a central square block park.
2. **A Civic Center district** in the north central area of downtown, bounded by Tennessee, Main, Ohio, and Loraine Streets. The concept called for a square block park between the City Hall and County blocks, surrounded by mixed use, government, or private offices.
3. **A Traditional Residential Village**, including small lot single-family homes around a central square block park in the northeast edge of the downtown district. This area incorporates some pre-existing single-family development.



[POSTED TO TALL CITY TOMORROW DISCUSSION PAGE:](#)

“Use the Plaza in downtown Midland for public cultural events - Midland festival ballet, local musicians, Big Spring Orchestra.”

— Sara S.



4. **An Urban Core**, focusing on the Courthouse/Centennial Plaza blocks as a catalyst for development on surrounding blocks.

5. **A Gateway Entertainment and Meeting District**, including the south edge of Downtown between Missouri Avenue and Front Street. This concept envisioned signature entertainment attractions, mixed use buildings, and retail uses, with a large city square park across Missouri Avenue from the Hilton Hotel.

Wall Street Lofts

This important project represents Downtown Midland's first large scale partnership to build new multi-family housing in the Downtown core. The project, which opened for occupancy in 2015, was developed on the strategic block bounded by Main, Baird, Wall, and Texas Avenue and includes 108 rental units with a connected parking garage. The building provides four stories of housing with first floor retail, and was designed to maintain an existing three bay commercial building that houses one of Downtown's signature restaurants. The project configuration is similar to that envisioned for the northwest residential village in the Smart Downtown Plan, but was developed on a core downtown site. The project has rented well in its first year of occupancy and demonstrates the market for a mid-rise, high-amenity residential product.



Midland Market Concept

A concept for a Midland Market has been proposed for a site immediately east of Wall Street Lofts, between Main Street, Texas Avenue, Baird Street, and Weatherford Street. The concept envisions a city market block surrounded by permanent retail buildings along the street edges. While the concept is not fully developed, it is significant by suggesting the value of a space devoted to small local enterprises in the Downtown core and focusing on full, after-hours use of an underdeveloped but strategically located property. It suggests a potential demand that was not anticipated by previous formal planning efforts for Downtown Midland. This concept type, in various locally adapted forms, has a significant record of success in helping to revitalize traditional downtown districts.



Courthouse/Centennial Plaza Site Redevelopment

With the demolition of the Midland County Courthouse, the "Courthouse Block" including the Courthouse structure, Centennial Plaza, and Midland Center became a focus of attention for major development. A plan for a 53-story Energy Tower office project with other mixed uses was canceled in 2014, and a subsequent proposal process awarded development rights to a plan to build a mixed use project featuring a signature hotel on the site. Other elements of the proposed project would include enhancement of Centennial Plaza and modernization of the convention center. The proposal also calls for additional retail uses.

INITIATIVES AND ACTIONS

Envisioning the heart of Midland as an interaction of four related and connected subdistricts leads to the possibility of a truly diverse and multi-purpose central district. The initiatives and recommended actions presented here propose a program that is within Midland’s reach and can help to channel private investment to meet the goals identified by the Tall City Tomorrow process. They build on some of the concepts proposed by the 2007 downtown plan, modified by trends and advances of the last eight years and ideas identified by citizens of all ages during the preparation of this plan. In this “big heart,” linkage is especially important, both within and among subdistricts. The major strategic components of this approach include:

- Complete the Centennial Plaza Core Project
- Increase the resident population of the Downtown Core and Frame
- Create space for innovative, entrepreneurial retail space in the Core
- Establish an innovation corridor that unites the north and south sides of the city.
- Integrate existing and potential parks and open spaces into a green network that connects the core, corridor, and village districts and their major resources.
- Use alternative transportation to connect the two primary activity centers with a walkable, revitalizing corridor.
- Recast the Medical Center/Village District as a walkable, intimate area that connects with its surrounding neighborhoods

1. Complete the Centennial Plaza Core Site

Complete the courthouse redevelopment project as a catalytic project, recognizing its importance but also understanding that it, by itself, will not be sufficient to reignite the downtown core. The current concept for the “Courthouse Block” and Centennial Plaza is important because it includes a quality hotel and supporting mainstream retail in its use mix. This will add needed hotel rooms to expand the market for events in an upgraded Midland Center. As long as supply is reasonably managed, two excellent hotels are far better than one – establishing the core as a place where visitors will find choice, convenience, and positive experience. Any program for the site should be ambitious and scaled to Downtown’s markets and needs, factors that were probably not the case with the Energy Tower proposal. But the failure of that previous proposal has also raised the stakes involved in executing any future project. In view of this, it is also important to recognize the limits of a single project, however important, to generate enough energy to revitalize an entire central district. The “Big Bang” approach of depending on one project to accomplish complex goals has generally proven to be ineffective. Other initiatives will be necessary to complement and spread this project’s beneficial impact. Complementary actions in the larger district will improve the courthouse/Centennial Plaza project’s ultimate success.





Initiatives necessary to implement a strong redevelopment project are generally in place through previous city action. These include the following:

A. Provide supporting public financing and public enhancements.

Action item: Finance site preparation and improvement costs caused by the extraordinary demands of major redevelopment.

Development in Downtown, and particularly on this site, includes costs and requirements not experienced by greenfield development of similar projects. These include hazard abatement and demolition of existing structures; high construction permit fees; and parking costs created by the need for either structured or underground parking. These costs are traditionally financed through Tax Increment Financing, a tool that should be reinstated in the downtown.

Action item: Enhance Centennial Plaza.

Centennial Plaza is the Downtown Core's primary public space and is properly sized for both structured events and informal activity. Improvements to its design can improve both its utility for events and its environment for routine activity and use as the "living room" of the core.

Action item: Improve Midland Center as a conference and event venue.

The third part of the triad is the Midland Center convention and event venue. The facility provides about 12,000 square feet of column free exhibition space and five upper level breakout rooms. An update will position Midland Center to take advantage of a second Class A hotel, and in turn will generate new business for two hotels in the downtown. Conference facilities in those hotels can also expand the attraction of Midland Center, including its ability to host larger events. Ultimately, in the future, Downtown Midland may require a larger convention facility, but Midland Center augmented by hotel facilities should suffice for at least the mid-term future. In the long-term, underused land south of Missouri Avenue provides an excellent future site, including a core-oriented front door and an industrial rear area for loading, delivery, and back of house functions.

2. Increase the city center's resident population.

The 2007 Smart Plan and subsequent efforts, including discussions held with such groups as downtown businesses and young professionals during the preparation of Tall City Tomorrow, all emphasized the need and demand for Downtown living. Downtown residential, a key ingredient of downtown revitalization across the country, takes advantage of new preferences for urban living by both younger and older adults, and adds activity, life, and proprietorship to urban core districts after regular business hours. Other advantages for Midland include:

- » Using residential development to “right-size” the commercial core, reducing the amount of underutilized or vacant land that disperses downtown activity.
- » Reduces average daily miles traveled and commuting times by giving people the opportunity to live and work within easy walking or bicycling distance, or by providing access by local routes rather than major commuter arterials.
- » Creates a neighborhood constituency that improves observation of central city areas, and integrates existing neighborhoods into the Downtown core.
- » Uses land and building resources more effectively.

A. Initiate a family-oriented, medium-density residential neighborhood in the northeast part of the Core district.

Medium-density housing includes small-lot single-family detached, single-family attached, and townhomes, ranging from 6 to 20 units per acre. The 2007 plan also proposed urban housing development in this general area, but this recommendation calls for beginning this neighborhood development toward the core, utilizing sites that now provide surface parking for county offices. A number of blocks in the Frame subarea are already in small-lot single-family use, and this concept connects these blocks to the center of the district. Neighborhood institutions like the YMCA, the First United Methodist campus, and Midland Academy also reinforce family housing in this area.

Action item: Partner with Midland County to build a new employee parking structure adjacent to the County Administrative Building.

Opening land for residential development begins with reducing the amount of land devoted to surface parking. A parking structure adjacent to the County administrative facility would accommodate county employees and free up land in the area now used for surface parking. A possible site is the half-block north of the administration center; another option is a joint arrangement with the First United Methodist Church to build a cooperative structure on the church parking site south of the county building.

Action item: Assemble existing county parking lots and adjacent vacant or underutilized land, making these sites available for residential development.

Privately owned land may be purchased outright as part of a redevelopment authority, or incorporate private owners into a development partnership with the value of their land as equity. Public funding will be necessary for acquisition and site preparation in order to offer housing at this relatively moderate density at feasible costs. Several options for proposals are open, including use of a master developer who in turn either builds or offers sites to participating builders, or taking proposals on individual sites or blocks from builder/developers, following detailed site development and building design standards.



Examples of housing in and adjacent to downtown districts.



B. Encourage and expedite adaptive residential and mixed uses in key buildings and sites in the Core.

Adaptive reuse for high-density rental housing (and other income-producing) uses can take advantage of historic tax credits and for affordable projects, low-income housing tax credits. Focus buildings include the highly important Texas Avenue “row” including the Vaughn Building, Building of the Southwest, Western United Building, and Petroleum Building; and the art-deco 105 West Wall building. Demolition of the Midland Executive Center and Mid-America Buildings along Illinois Avenue opens a site that could be a multi-use space for parking, open space, and food truck park.

Action item: *Provide appropriate public incentives for adaptive reuse of historic or architecturally significant but underused core buildings.*

Public initiatives may include TIF, authorization for use of tax credits if necessary including expediting National Register listings, making publicly controlled land available for supporting parking, and waiver of construction permit fees on the basis of public benefit for reusing these important structures.

Action item: *Establish a predictable incentive structure for new construction of residential projects in the Downtown core and frame.*

Wall Street Lofts was a pioneering project in several ways. In addition to demonstrating the market for high-amenity and relatively high-rent residential development, it also represented a pioneering partnership, with city participation, in project financing through tax increment financing, which in turn created some controversy. Midland should establish a predictable and reliable incentive structure for residential projects. Variables in determining level and type of assistance include environmental remediation issues and cost; housing mix and affordability; design quality; public realm improvements; special development costs; and location in areas designated by the comprehensive plan.

C. Support rehabilitation and infill development in the Corridor and Medical Center/Village subdistricts.

Action item: *Establish a residential rehabilitation financing program for declining properties in the Corridor subdistrict.*

While most homes in the Corridor subdistrict are in good and excellent condition, scattered housing deterioration occurs and can have a serious impact on the value and marketability of surrounding homes. A rehabilitation program should address this spot deterioration, using direct or leveraged rehabilitation loans and in some cases, acquisition, rehabilitation, and resale of units by a community development corporation. The Corridor and Village subdistricts also have significant infill residential opportunities, and the city should support zoning changes that comply with comprehensive plan recommendations.

3. Develop destinations for innovative and creative retailing.

Complement mainstream retail in Downtown and other city center subdistricts by creating environments for small enterprises and innovative retailers. The Midland Market proposal described previous identified something fundamentally important – the need for small-scale innovative retailing and the potential value for a city marketplace as a key destination in the core of Midland. Such a project is appropriate on a site that is within easy walking distance of the most intense part of the Core (including an area with a number of out-of-town visitors) but not directly in the center. The project’s area should be appropriately scaled and combined with a more conventional private development that serves an established market, such as a continuation of the housing precedents established by Wall Street Lofts.

A. Develop a mixed use city marketplace in, but on the edge of the Downtown Core.

Action item: Assemble an appropriate site that meets the criteria for this type of project.

The site described by the Midland Market proposal, on the square block immediately east of Wall Street Lofts between Baird, Weatherford, Wall, and Texas Avenue meets the criteria of a site near visitors, within easy walking distance of the Core, and in a transitional area between intense and less intense development. This site is helped by nearby major development initiatives, but other sites also present themselves. The project will eventually require a public/private partnership involving existing property owners, a developer, a market operator or development corporation, and the City of Midland.

Action item: Create a conceptual site design that guides the development process.

A feasible project could include the following elements:

- » A half quadrangle formed by street-oriented buildings defining a market square, on half of a block. A gateway can define entry into the interior square. Surrounding buildings would include retail at the first level with access to both the interior square and the street, with the possibility of one or two levels of residential uses above.
- » An open or sheltered market square in the interior of the block, accommodating both events and vendor sales. Midland’s relatively mild climate suggests that this space could receive significant year-round use.
- » A residential block with below grade parking defining the edge of the market square, expanding the Wall Street Lofts market.





B. Reinforce local retailers in the Medical Center/Village subdistrict by creating a positive, connected public environment, including traffic flow and street design.

While Midland's transportation investments like Loop 250 are primarily designed to move traffic, they also have represented major investments in economic and business development. Commercial businesses and offices grow around the access that these roads offer. Retail areas in established areas have transportation issues as well, but they are different. Many observers consider the Village to be Midland's major existing center for a variety of interesting, locally-owned retail uses. This cluster is ideally located to be an especially vital and walkable business concentration. However, the intersection of major streets creates an environment that is fractured and difficult for all modes of travel to negotiate. A program to address these transportation issues would enhance the business environment and help the Village grow as a diverse and modern business center. A concept to accomplish this is presented later in this chapter.

Action item: Execute the project with the appropriate financing and organizational structure.

In several cases, the marketplace is operated by a nonprofit corporation or authority, or by a private, for-profit entity. Nonprofit operation, financed as a community project, may provide a friendlier environment for young local businesses that can make the market a unique attraction. A housing or office element would be developed as a private project, using the incentive structure identified above.

4. Establish a business innovation corridor that links the Core with the south side of downtown across the railroad.

Downtown Midland traditionally has grown as the center of the energy industry and this enviable status is likely to continue into the future, regardless of market fluctuations. But the city center can also prosper by specializing in another facet of the energy industry – that is, the energy of new industry, new ideas, and new enterprises. A prime exhibit is Susie's South 40, a confectionery south of the Downtown Core and a demonstration of how a combination of on-line marketing, great products, and a memorable visitor experience can bring new energy to Downtown. The Marienfeld Street corridor between Front Street and Missouri Avenue, where Susie's South 40 conducts business, appears to be an excellent place for this type of enterprise. The corridor includes an established business, a business development center that house the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, available land, good access, and a railroad crossing that links to South Midland. Traffic here is present, but moves at a much more leisurely pace than that of adjacent Big Spring Street.

Action Step: Develop a program with property owners and economic development organizations, including the Hispanic Chamber, the MBDC (Midland College's Business and Economic Development Center), and others to define and market this corridor for innovative new and mature businesses.

A number of successful examples of such branding have occurred in advancing cities. Oklahoma City's Automobile Alley, extending north from the city's downtown core, began with such a modest branding process. This has led to millions of dollars of new enterprises, including both business and housing development.

Action step: Structure and develop a small business incubator that provides space for new businesses to start and grow, with the ability either to grow in place or move out into new, larger space.

The incubator movement has evolved into the private sector, but began through private nonprofit organizations. The typical incubator program included seed capital financing, affordable space with shared services, and technical assistance. Increasingly, incubators have been developed privately, and venture capitalization has become somewhat more available on the private side. Whether public or private, an incubator belongs in an innovation corridor and can use either new construction or adaptation of an existing building with sufficient open floor space for maximum flexibility. Sites for incubators have included former furniture factories, garages, car dealerships, and supermarkets.

Action step: Develop an attractive but not extravagant public environment that establishes the business theme of the corridor.

Physical identity creates a better business address and gives an individual enterprise the sense of being part of something bigger. In addition, a good basic public realm, including sidewalks, some landscape, and consistent, well-maintained lighting presents a sense of efficiency, quality, and functionality. The growth of Chicago's Ravenswood District is an excellent example of using building stock and functional public improvements to parlay a decaying industrial area into a well-known center of innovative business activity.

Action step: Create financing programs and incentives to encourage and sustain new business.

This step should engage the private sector from an advisory and financing perspective and may include:

- Brokering and referral of clients to existing technical assistance programs.
- Re-establish TIF with guidelines for its use to help finance site development and capital building improvements.
- Building equity partnerships.





5. Integrate parks into a green midtown network.

Connect the central district's parks and open spaces, existing and future, into a green web that permeates the city's heart. Where necessary, develop new open spaces that meet the needs of a mixed use neighborhood and enhance difficult to use sites. Parks increase the desirability and marketability of development districts to both existing and prospective residents. The ability of parks to generate new surrounding development has been clearly demonstrated, from Central Park in New York in the nineteenth century to the Atlanta Belt Line in the twenty-first. The 2007 Smart Plan recognized this formative role by proposing full block urban squares in the center of its various development districts. But large scale park development is expensive from both a capital and operational perspective and takes land out of consideration for development. Also, the parks proposed by that plan concept are relatively isolated from one another and from the surrounding fabric of built-up midtown neighborhoods.

A different approach starts with the parks and resources that already exist in the area, using them as the foundation for a major quality of life amenity that reinforces the attraction of living and working in a city center. The approach includes initiatives that address:

- Condition and use of existing parks.
- Development of new open spaces to fill functional and physical gaps.
- Linkages among parks, museums, and other life quality resources.

A. Implement a program to rehabilitate and enhance existing parks in the heart of Midland.

Parks that serve areas within or near the city center include Hill, Wadley Barron, Haley, Dennis the Menace, and Ulmer Park. Centennial Plaza, the Core's only public open space, will be upgraded as part of any courthouse redevelopment project. A comprehensive rehabilitation program will help these parks maintain their status as anchors to their respective neighborhoods.

Action item: Develop rehabilitation and enhancement master plans for each of the central district parks.

These should include neighborhood participation and should address demographics of the service areas; present and future demands; evaluation of site, structures, and equipment; and a master plan with cost estimates.

Action item: Establish a priority-setting process and dedicate funding through the city's capital improvement program to implement the park master plans one park at a time.

The process should establish criteria based on such factors as level of use, access, impact on neighborhood and area development objectives, safety issues, nature and need for park facilities, and other criteria. An objective priority-setting process that involves all city departments involved with planning and maintenance of parks should be held. The priorities then form the basis for a ten-year central park improvement program, with parks completed one by one over the course of the implementation period.

B. Develop new parks to fill physical and functional gaps.

Action item: Acquire and improve open or underused sites at the seams of Midland's two intersection grids as image features that both define to core and provide public use.

The heart of Midland was actually platted on three intersecting street grids. The Downtown Core's streets are lined up in ordinal directions (north is true north). The area northwest of A and Indiana Street is rotated about 12 degrees counterclockwise, while streets south of Indiana parallel or run perpendicular to the Union Pacific railroad tracks. The result are triangular seams where these grids meet each other, creating parcels that are very difficult to develop. Examples are sites at the divergence of Indian and College Avenues; "Indiana Islands" between Indiana and Holloway Avenues; land between A and Carrizo Streets; and A Street and a continuation of San Angelo Street south of Tennessee Avenue. Landscaping and some limited public improvements, street furniture, water and other aesthetic features, and public use as space permits could turn these difficult spaces into community assets that mark transitions in the city fabric. In a few cases, sites have been developed with small and interesting buildings and businesses that can be integrated into these public spaces.

Action item: Develop an informal multi-use open space that meet the informal recreation needs of downtown residents.

While an improved Centennial Plaza will be an attractive formal space for events and downtown life, a growing resident population will require spaces with more room – to run, play informal games, walk dogs, and other essentials of urban life. A possible opportunity for this informal open space is a 4 acre triangular site north of Front Street between Big Spring and adjacent to the county library. It is currently part of a large parking lot, about half of which is devoted to library parking. These large lots south of Missouri Avenue are underutilized, however, and actual parking use could be consolidated in other lots. In the long term, this site could be part of a large redevelopment project that could include new convention facilities if markets exceed the capacity of Midland Center.



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“Bring parkway concept inside the Loop by connecting local parks”

Action item: Design small neighborhood parks into new residential areas in and round the downtown core.

Small open spaces for play and informal activity should be designed into family-oriented residential developments. The actual form of these open spaces depends on the nature of the project and housing design. They could include green conversion of streets, neighborhood squares, or greenways, but would be designed primarily for local neighborhood use.

C. Link parks, schools, museums, and historic sites into a connected network of “parkway streets.”

As part of the unifying fabric for newly developing areas, the Tall City Tomorrow Plan proposes a parkway that will connect new neighborhoods together. In Midland’s heart, this connecting concept can take the form of a web of connecting streets that link parks and open spaces, important community facilities, museums and historic sites, and schools. This network provides a number of opportunities for walking routes, neighborhood improvement projects, urban design enhancements, and private property enhancements. They also expand the catchment area of neighborhood facilities by providing safe routes to parks and schools.

Action item: Establish a network of connecting “parkway streets” that will be addressed through this program.

Candidate streets should provide direct routes between features, relatively low to moderate traffic volumes, slow to moderate speeds, and attractive land use and street environments. The newly adopted Hike and Bike Master Plan should be used to define parkway streets and proposed pedestrian and bicycle improvements consistent with the plan. The diagram in this section illustrates a possible parkway street network for the city center area.

Action item: Define a menu of features to include in parkway streets, survey streets for the presence of these elements, and develop plans and cost estimates for each segment.

Features should include continuous sidewalks or pedestrian paths, bike facilities if applicable, identifying and wayfinding graphics, and street landscaping. Intersections with major streets and other barriers require special attention, and safe crossings of arterials should be designed into the segment plans.

Action item: Include parkway street improvements into the capital improvement plan, preferably coordinated with rehabilitation of the parks that they connect.

As future capital improvement programs are developed the parkway streets should be included with higher priority parkways done first. A priority parkway would include those connecting parks that are being rehabilitated or routes along which a significant redevelopment project is being completed.

6. Use alternative transportation to reinforce the Corridor's linkage of the Core and Village subdistricts.

While private automobiles account for the vast majority of trips made in Midland, the city does have a transit system with significant patronage and designated and signed bicycle routes that serve specific destinations. Alternative transportation, including transit, bicycle, and pedestrian accommodations are ideally suited to an area like the central district, where maximum travel distance between activity nodes is less than two miles. This can shift some short local trips from car to other modes and increase the ease of routine movement in the area. But it also helps build development density if service is pleasant, frequent, and convenient enough, and helps define the brand and ultimately the future of this district.

A. Develop a frequent transit shuttle connecting the two major activity nodes – the Core and the Village – by way of the district's mixed use corridor.

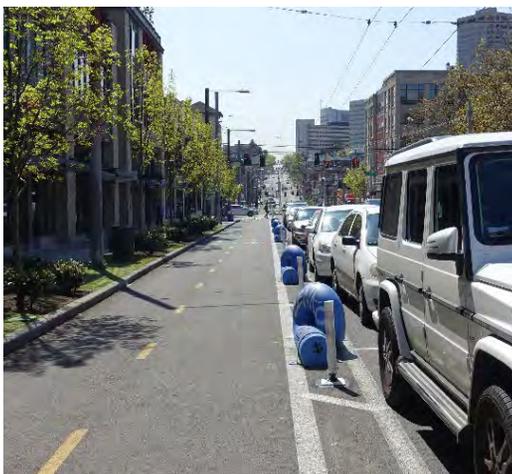
The 2007 Smart Downtown Plan correctly envisioned a role for transit in the downtown revitalization process. It recommended a transit loop with a north-south orientation in the office core of Downtown. However, office workers do not generate a significant routine demand for transit during the basic workday. An east-west loop that serves the most intensive part of the Core, the Corridor and museum district, and Midland Memorial Hospital and surrounding office and retail area presents a richer passenger opportunity.

Action item: *Study the feasibility and character of an east-west transit loop linking the Core and Medical Center/Village with direct, frequent service and interchange with other routes in the Midland bus system.*

An effective system in this context, should have several important attributes:

- » Simplicity. Often, in an effort to serve everything, circulator shuttle routes become difficult to understand and subject to many route diversions. A transit loop in this area must be simple and direct for maximum service quality and frequency. A route concept illustrated in this section operates between Weatherford Street and Meta Drive along Illinois and Wall Street as its primary routes. The only diversion warranted may be a short run to the museum district one block south of the Wall Street leg.
- » Frequency. An effective shuttle service must be very frequent, running on short enough headways to make it unnecessary to use a schedule. The loop proposed above is about 4 miles in length, requiring about 20 minutes to complete. In a single direction, the loop could provide 30 minute frequencies with one vehicle. Operating as a bi-directional loop with one vehicle in each direction can provide 10-15 minute service to each point along the route, within the range of an effective service.
- » Distinctive. Image is important for this service, and part of its advantage is long-term; that is, encouraging residential density and building utility through good service. A distinctive vehicle is important in helping advance this image. Effective shuttles like Denver's 16th Street Mall and Santa Barbara's downtown shuttle take different approaches to establishing a strong image.
- » Low cost. Ideally, a shuttle service should be free, and its operation could be funded through a business improvement district.





B. Establish a clear and safe bicycle transportation system within this central district.

The heart of Midland, essentially two miles from end to end, rich in a variety of destinations, and flat topographically, is ideally suited to local bicycle transportation. Nationwide, areas with visible and easy to use bicycle facilities have proven highly appealing to the millennial generation, and are often associated with innovation and urban interaction. Interestingly, corridors with strong bicycle infrastructure like cycle tracks have also experienced increases in retail business and in some cases new levels of residential development. Portions of Louisiana and Michigan Avenues currently have east-west bike lanes, establishing some precedent for bicycle transportation in the connecting corridor.

Action item: Implement and adapt recommendations of the 2014 Connect Midland Plan for the city center.

Connect Midland maintains and expands the current Michigan/Louisiana Avenue bike lanes and adds north-south lanes along Broadway/N Street, F Street, Colorado Street, and Main Street. A major recommendation is providing protected bike lanes along the Wall Street corridor. This recommended route should be extended through the Core district to the Front Street intersection. These bike lane corridors should also include bicycle wayfinding signs marking routes to area destinations, including the George W. Bush Childhood Home, schools, parks, and the museum district.

Action item: Begin a pilot bike share system in the central district.

Bike share systems work best within districts about the size of Midland's district and could start on a relatively small scale, with between six to ten stations. They can be an effective local transportation system, complement the transit loop, and accommodate visitors traveling to museums and conference or business destinations. Hospitals and health insurance companies have been significant sponsors of these systems, and the Midland Memorial Hospital is a logical advocate for promoting the city center as a healthy living environment.

7. Recast the Medical Center/Village Subdistrict as a walkable, mixed use activity and employment center.

Create the destination neighborhood that many residents identified during the public engagement process. The Medical Center brings hundreds of workers to the area a day while the surrounding Village District offers shopping and dining. For the most part these uses are disconnected and the area does not feel like a destination where you park once to visit multiple businesses. Improving access and adding to the mix of land uses can create a vibrant neighborhood district where people live, work, and shop.

A. Implement a traffic and pedestrian redesign program to increase clarity, reduce traffic conflicts and congestion, increase safety, and provide better pedestrian connections.

To date the district has been designed for easy movement of the car. This should be retained while creating a better environment for the pedestrian. These improvements should create defined areas for pedestrians that make for safe and comfortable access within reasonable distances. Until this happens, few residents will be interested in leaving the hospital on foot or parking once to visit multiple businesses. It will also be important to connecting the district to adjoining residential uses.

B. Improve business district features, including public parking and streetscape, focusing on multi-occupant small business blocks – notably the Dodson Street and Andrews Highway blocks

Improvements to the business district should create a customer friendly environment and done in a targeted approach. Improvements should not be scattered, but focused on specific blocks or nodes that create an impact and build momentum for additional private and public investment.

C. Develop a neighborhood square as a common area for both the commercial district and the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

A shared green space is a great opportunity to bring residents and visitors together. The space could be designed in partnership with the hospital. Research has found that access to nature improves the healing process and while this space may not be directly attached to the hospital improved access between the two could create a great opportunity for the hospital and neighborhood. The space could incorporate aspects of a “healing garden” where hospital visitors and patients could find a retreat while also having spaces where shoppers and residents could meet and gather.

D. Expedite urban housing development on underused blocks or deteriorated sites on the western edge of the district.

Earlier sections of the Tall City Tomorrow Plan placed an emphasis on the need for more affordable and diverse housing options. The underused blocks on the edge of the district provide a great opportunity to incorporate high quality urban housing that is adjacent to jobs and shopping.

Dear City Planners - Thank you for even doing this and soliciting citizen input. Here are my comments....

Old Town areas/downtown:

“Encourage or provide incentives for attractive storefronts (trees again) but also promote rehabbing of old buildings - for restaurants, retail, art galleries, music venues. Make it an entertainment area.”

The Village / Medical Center Area

