



# **Downtown Plan Report**

**March 2010**



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## CITY OF AZLE/PROJECT TEAM

### City Council

Mayor	Russ Braudis
City Council Place 1/Mayor Pro Tem	Tony Haas
City Council Place 2	Alan Brundrett
City Council Place 3	Bill Jones
City Council Place 4	Paul Crabtree
City Council Place 5	Rouel Rothenberger, Jr.
City Council Place 6	June Earp

### Staff Members

City Manager	Craig Lemin
Assistant to the City Manager	Susie Hiles
Neighborhood Services Supervisor	Dana Doss-McLaughlin
Police Chief	Steve Meyers
Fire Chief	Will Scott
Director of Administration/Finance	Lawrence Bryant
Human Resource Director	Cat Schlueter
Court Administrator	Misty Martin
Library Director	Curren McLane
Administrative Assistant	Debbie Clayton

### Consultant Team

GSBS Architects	Sam T. Jones, RLA, ALSA
GSBS Architects	Andrew Oxley, LEED AP
GSBS Consultant	Marty Wieder, AICP



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Few things in life are certain. In fact, change is many times the only constant. It will come regardless of what we do. The time for outlining the future is always now, and the desires we have for the future must be addressed by preparing for them today.

Municipalities are constantly challenged to provide and maintain affordable, high quality basic services and amenities for their citizens. And City leaders must balance that provision with the desire to provide a healthy environment for businesses and community interaction.

As a result, a sense of place and identity are at the heart of every community. For most rural communities, “Main Street” was the origin of their commercial beginnings—and the springboard of their Downtown. By default, these places more often than not became the center of activity for their community.

Azle’s Downtown was formed and in existence prior to automobiles, and therefore somewhat walkable and fine-grained as to layout. Yet for almost a century, development has been auto centric and pod based. Today, sprawl and the continual hunger for new development often dilutes the original commercial center as communities age. In this trend, Azle is no exception.

However, a well-planned, well-managed Downtown environment provides opportunities for social interaction and commerce—perpetuating the idea of “place” and the center of activity. Such a

place should be available to citizens of all ages on a continual basis—and likewise should present a positive, inviting face to the community and its visitors.

The City of Azle retained the professional services of GSBS Architects to study a 200 acre section of Downtown Azle, bordered by the southern intersection of Main Street and State Highway 199 (SH199), SH199 frontage Road to the northern intersection of SH199 and Main Street, along Azle Highway to the east bank of Ash Creek to south Stewart Street and back to Main.

GSBS was tasked with:

- Reviewing the City’s previous study;
- Mapping the study area;
- Evaluating the existing conditions;
- Attending meetings with Downtown Azle business leaders, property owners and City officials;
- Preparing a “broad stroke” land use plan;
- Preparing a resulting master plan;
- Exploring options to improve the walkability and visual aspects of the corridor; and
- Making specific recommendations for improvements.

The report that follows chronicles the planning process and documents the findings of this exercise. The recommendations and suggestions outlined in this document attempt to identify specific items that the City of Azle should address today in order to plan for modifications that will benefit future generations.

“Small town community, big City opportunity.”

~ Azle focus group participant



## PURPOSE

The City of Azle is undergoing a transition. And as a part of the dynamic Dallas-Fort Worth metro area, Azle is likewise experiencing growth. The challenge is to accommodate this growth while maintaining and enhancing a sense of place which respects and even celebrates the community's unique characteristics.

Azle's Main Street is the old SH 199 that detours off the newer SH 199 Freeway and skirts the western edge of the Azle City limits. Discussions between Azle and the Texas Department of Transportation on the possibility of deeding this thoroughfare to the City itself have taken place for many years.

Two major thoroughfares intersect with the northwestern and southeastern tips of Main Street: FM 730, a path taken frequently by Azle Independent School District buses each morning and afternoon to reach unincorporated areas to the west, and Stewart Street.

While the original SH199 is primarily an auto-oriented corridor characterized by a mix of older suburban retail and residential uses, the southern portion is much more pedestrian and appears to have been intentionally designed and built that way. Perhaps the lengthy presence of two of Azle's oldest Churches played a part in making this portion of Main Street south of Greenway more walkable.

The street corridor is single lane with no curbs or continuous sidewalks—other than

the sidewalks included on either side of the street to the south of Greenway.

Additionally, TxDOT's recent adoption of the Project Development Process Manual for the redesign of arterial roadways provides the City the opportunity to reinvent Main Street as a walkable urban destination that supports new development that can then truly become the heart of the community.

Finally, the City of Azle also has a unique opportunity to capitalize on the recent addition of the Public Library and Central Park, both of which front Main Street. While the Memorial Public Library and Central Park are already integral to Azle's Downtown, their massing and traffic benefits have yet to be quantified. Their presence may set the stage for a rejuvenation and rebirth of the corridor's northern leg.

And as Azle continues on past this study toward testing and implementation of the recommendations to follow in this report, we encourage City leaders to keep in mind four key "corridor challenges", as described last April at the 2009 American Planning Association Annual Meeting:

- Overabundance of land zoned for retail;
- Poor connectivity with adjacent retail;
- "Dead Zones"; and,
- Lack of comfort, convenience & security for pedestrians.



**"One thing that drew me to this area was the same thing: You could feel the community when you walked in. There's an acceptance here that you don't always feel in other towns. It's an open-hearted community."**

~ Azle focus group participant

## PROCESS OVERVIEW

People have a tendency to support what they help create, and there's no better way to ensure buy-in for a program or project than to ask people what they want. That's exactly what GSBS Architects sought to do for the Azle Downtown Plan update through a series of meetings over a two-day period in August, 2009.

In preparation for these meetings—called with property and business owners, not-for-profit organizations, Chamber of Commerce representatives and Azle ISD officials—GSBS professionals prepared a series of base maps illustrating the target area, its zoning and uses, the associated Thoroughfare Plan, topography and drainage constraints. What follows is a compilation of the things shared—and the suggestions given.

GSBS' team of professionals compiled and assembled the available graphic data from various sources including, the City of Azle, North Central Texas Council of Governments and other publicly available sources to generate a series of maps illustrating the existing conditions within the study area. This data was used to produce a series of study maps of the Downtown area.

The GSBS team visited the site on several separate occasions to walk and photograph the study area and analyze the existing conditions. We also visually verified the general accuracy of the inventory maps, noting additional information not detected in the maps.

Upon completion of the inventory maps and site visits, GSBS' team evaluated the data and generated a series of analysis maps illustrating a more detailed inventory of current business types and land uses. We mapped the existing public parking, noting the presence of open green spaces, both private land and public rights-of-way, and noted the existing significant trees.

5 separate meetings were conducted with groups focused on specific interests and uses.

These groups were

1. Retail
2. Church
3. Medical
4. Office
5. AISD

**“We talk a lot about places,  
but it's also about people.”**

**~ Martin Willey, Royal Town  
Planning Institute**





GSBS staff members presented the collective series of maps and overlays to each of the focused meetings. Participants commented and maintained good interaction throughout the discussions, resulting in a great deal of consensus and agreement among the participants.

To facilitate discussion and dialogue with the groups a standard list of questions were prepared and asked of each group. Listed below are the base line questions.

#### *Azle Downtown Plan – Charrette Questions*

- If you own land within the Downtown area, what do you prefer to develop on that property?
- What would you prefer to see done with properties adjacent to or near your business or property?
- Is there anything you prefer NOT to see developed on your property?
- Is there anything you prefer NOT to see Developed on neighboring properties?
- How do you think it should look within Azle's Downtown area?
- Are there any obstacles or challenges you see to the operation of your business or development of your property?
- Is there any theme that you think Downtown should take on architecturally?
- Out of curiosity, what do you consider to be Azle's chief icon or symbol?

Each of these groups had specific items of interest and concern but there was a great deal of similarity and consistency in the responses.



The responses were categorized as following:

- Preferred Additions and Amenities
- Infrastructure
- Facilities
- Services
- Landscaping
- Prevented Uses
- Look/Theme

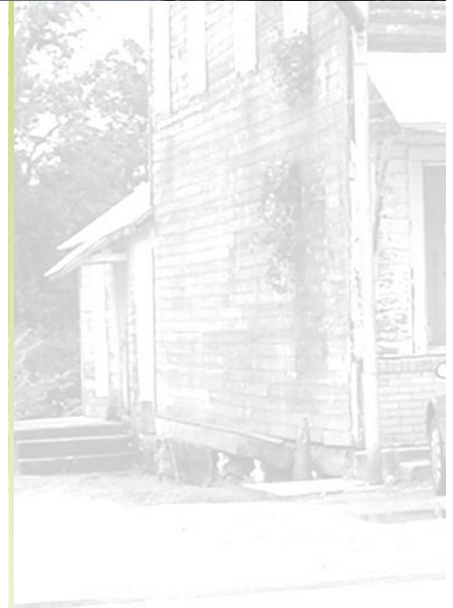
#### **Preferred Additions and Amenities**

Participants mentioned several improvements that they desire to see in the Downtown area, including:

#### **Infrastructure**

“It would be more like a Main Street if it had drainage, sidewalks, curbs and gutters. That's the baseline.”

- Curbs & Gutters
- Parking spaces/lots - “We have a problem with access and parking now.”  
“Would the solution maybe be the City



developing parking for the entire [Main] street?” “Why couldn’t we have certain parking lots situated in Downtown?”

- Sidewalks - especially on the north end of Main Street “When you start talking about sidewalks, we’d love to see that.”
- Islands at the intersections - perhaps to assist with traffic calming; “I like the enhancement at the intersections. It tells people there may be more down that street, that this is a street coming up. It makes it easier not to miss the turn. It’s going to be beneficial to any business that’s a block off Main Street.”)
- More speed limit signs and enforcement - “Slowing down the traffic.”
- A traffic signal at Main Street’s intersection with Industrial
- Entry & way-finding signage - “Maybe something pylon-like, but still architecturally attractive.”
- Public furniture - “I love the idea of some outside sitting areas.” “Nice benches out in front of each shop.”
- Relocating electric lines/poles fronting Main Street - either to be buried or moved behind businesses
- Street Lights/Light poles - perhaps that appear to be gas lamps, “Something you can use to put things on [like banners].”
- Extension of Lotus - “We’d love that. That’s a deficiency. Would also help to have the other roads built there.”
- Bridge @ FM730 and Ash Creek - “Add a turn lane onto Main Street. It would help unload the back-up.”
- TxDOT signage from SH199 - A significant, well-lit entry sign from the south would point out Main Street to

northeast bound traffic.

- Consistent sewer system plan - Some existing buildings are on septic systems and the back of the lots are not accessible for parking, due to the leach fields.

#### Facilities

- City Hall - mentioned several times; “I always thought that City Hall should be down on Main Street” or in the Downtown area. Someone else suggested the Old Azle Manor property off Church Street. “Not a lot of homes there. It adjoins the AISD Rock School.”
- Ash Creek - At the very least, there’s a desire for more park development along the creek. Yet some envision even more . . . “I still don’t understand why something’s not been done with Ash Creek. Maybe more park development all the way down that thing. Something

“We’re not a county seat, but why can’t we look like one?”





more than where tires and empty bottles go.” “Have you ever been to San Antonio Riverwalk? That’s what I see. But it needs to be in the shade of Ash Creek. Build it up, bring up the sides—to make it something that could be viable.”

- Water fountains - scenic rather than for drinking
- A splash land - (pad or park) and/or community pool
- Facade improvements - “Renovate the facades of Downtown buildings. If there was a way to renovate the facades, it would be so nice.”
- Multi-family housing - “An apartment complex; housing.”
- Dancing water/fountains - interactive display
- Public art
- A ballpark or recreational park
- A batting cage
- Bowling lanes
- Miniature golf
- A big Opry House for the Azle Opry—located on Main Street
- A Western Museum
- A movie theatre
- Retail - boutique or at a shopping center; participants specifically named a Starbucks and a Half-price Books, coffee shops and a winery
- Restaurants - Traildust or another steakhouse and “outdoor dining” were specifically mentioned; “What Azle is totally, absolutely missing is nice restaurants.” “I don’t think the Downtown area will ever be successful without restaurants.” Another

participant noted, “When El Paseo moved in, our business shot up.”)

- Bed & Breakfast hotels - “The City needs more lodging, period.” “A bed & breakfast would bring people here.” “That white house would be a good bed & breakfast, too.”

### Services

- Daily items & needs - “Convenience goods are the hope for walkability.”
- Bus or tram service - “Bus service, to enable people to shop along Main Street and Ash Creek. There’s no way to get from Wells Burnett (and the Lake) to Ash Creek. From Eagle Mountain Lake/ Boat Club Road to the service areas.” “What about a tram or something running up and down Main Street? The tram could be advertisement.”

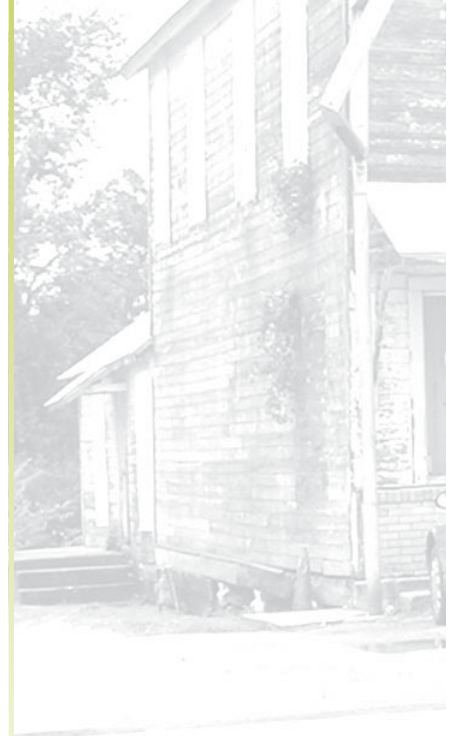
### Landscaping

- Shade - “There does need to be more shaded places.”
- Street trees - “I can see beautiful trees all along Main Street.”
- Landscaping in the intersection islands

### Prevented Use

Participating Azle property and business owners communicated their preference against the following items being located in the Downtown area:

- single-family detached housing
- sexually-oriented businesses
- junk yards



- any type of storage, especially visible from the street
- tattoo parlors
- bars

### Look/Theme

“How do you symbolize community?”

Business and property owners agreed Downtown Azle really lacks any particular architectural look or theme. As one participant said, “I don’t think there’s anything Downtown that attracts anyone unless they’re coming to do business.”

They were however split as to a preferred architectural style; some referenced a desire to be more Western, while others asked that it be more non-descript and not geared to any particular period.

Yet when pressed, they did communicate a variety of thoughts for the look and feel of Azle’s Downtown. For instance, they did agree on their desire for consistency and continuity, since as one individual put it, “it’s a hodge-podge”.

In two separate sessions, participants also talked about the need to blend old and new and to work together with the younger generation. As one participant stated, a “clean look that will pass from generation to generation”. Someone else suggested that “It’s always good to see the younger generation suggest something. That can blend and work together. You need to bring in both age groups.”

Among the items that were mentioned more

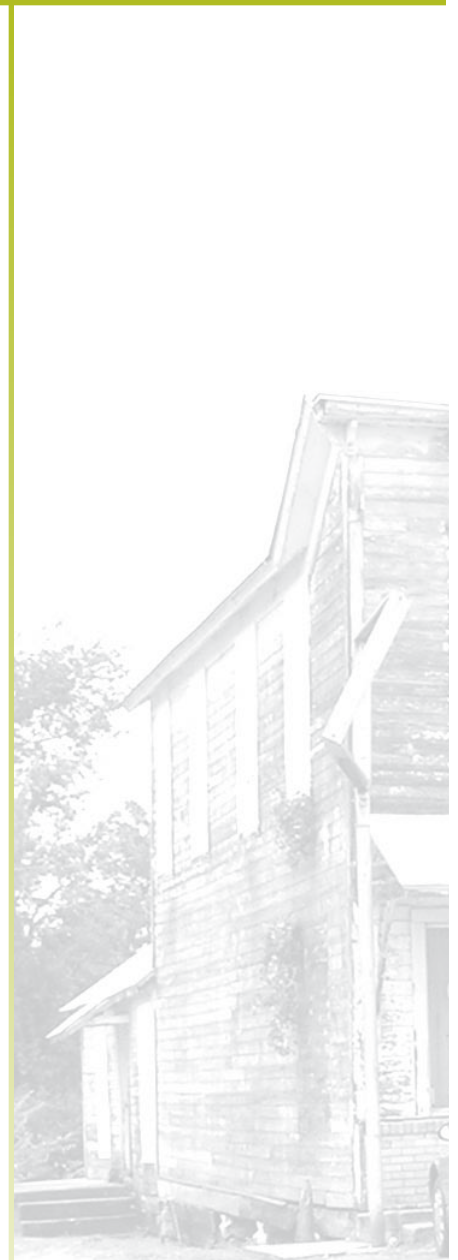
than once during these sessions:

- Mr. Trammel’s stonework for one. As someone mentioned, “I like Trammel’s stuff; I like the rock. It’s beautiful.”
- The new Library building, which can serve as an example for other, future projects within the Downtown.

One other idea mentioned in one of the sessions is murals “Look how beautiful murals are. That’s where your history shows up. Something that pertains to the history of Azle, that’s what people like.”

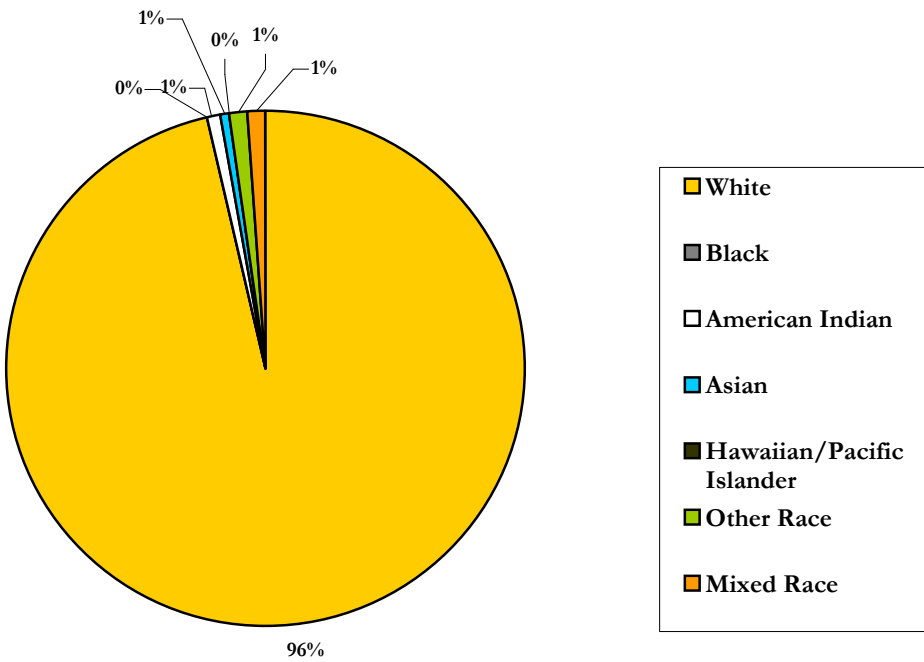
And as pointed out in another session, at the very least there needs to be building standards or guidelines for Downtown structures.

As related to look, a recent update by TxDOT to their Process Manual for redevelopment of Urban Thoroughfares may open the door for Azle to approach things from a more creative perspective—especially since the old SH 199 right of way is exactly the type of downtown corridor that a TxDOT task force had in mind with the Process Manual revisions.



## Section One

DEMOGRAPHICS

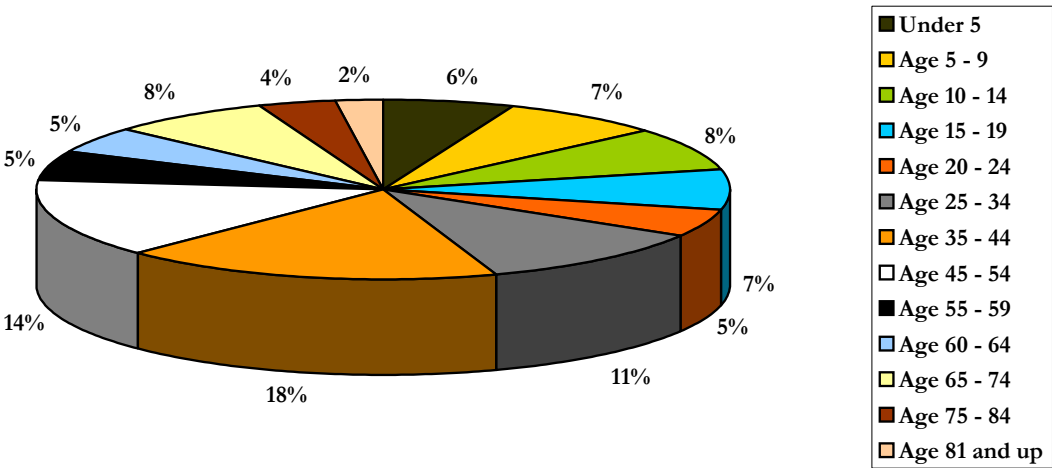


Ethnicity

Total Population by Ethnicity

White	9,062
Black	0
American Indian	61
Asian	49
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	6
Other	105
Mixed Race	107

Population by Age

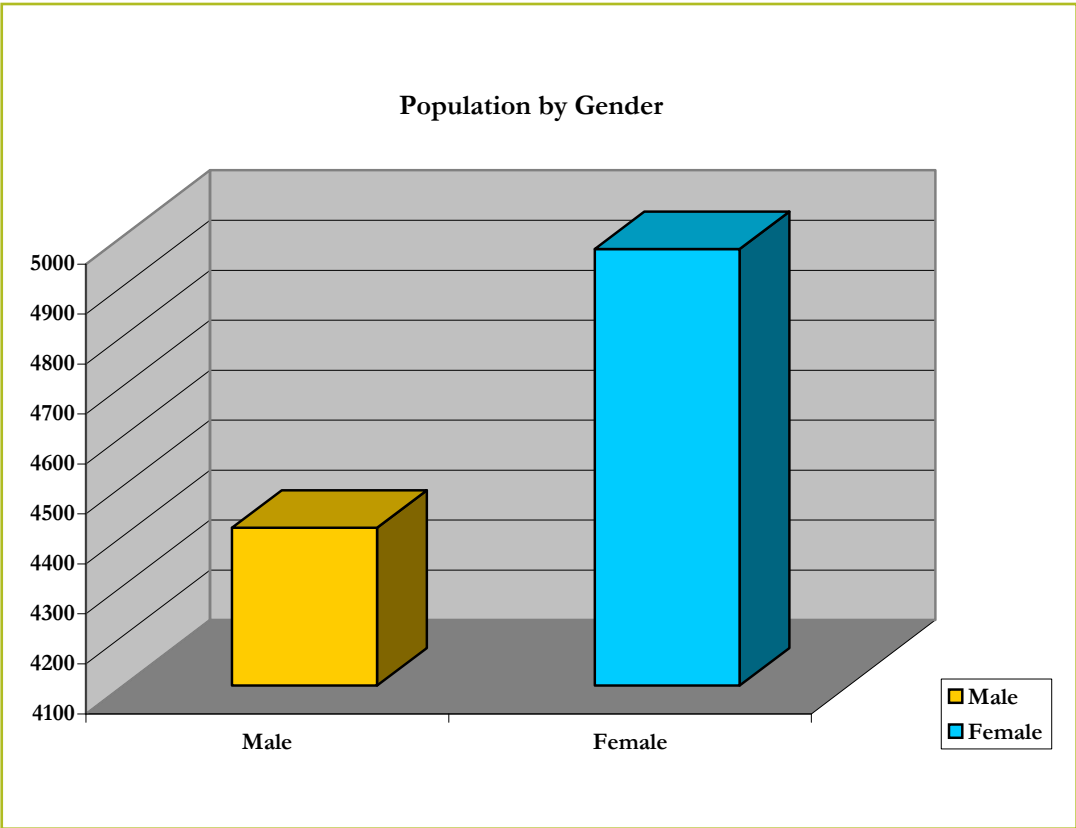
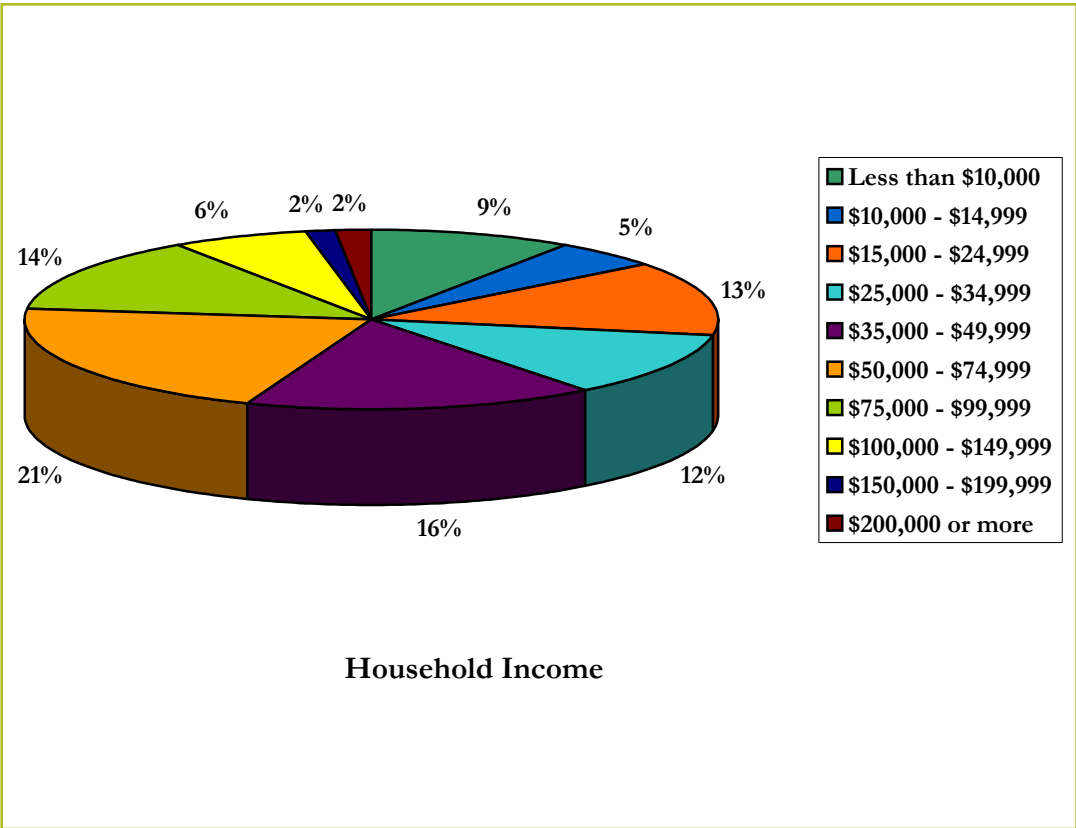


Total Population by Age

Under 5	566
Age 5 - 9	700
Age 10 - 14	753
Age 15 - 19	697
Age 20 - 24	469
Age 25 - 34	1,020
Age 35 - 44	1,680
Age 45 - 54	1,344
Age 55 - 59	471
Age 60 - 64	454
Age 65 - 74	709
Age 75 - 84	346
Age 85 and up	199



# DEMOGRAPHICS



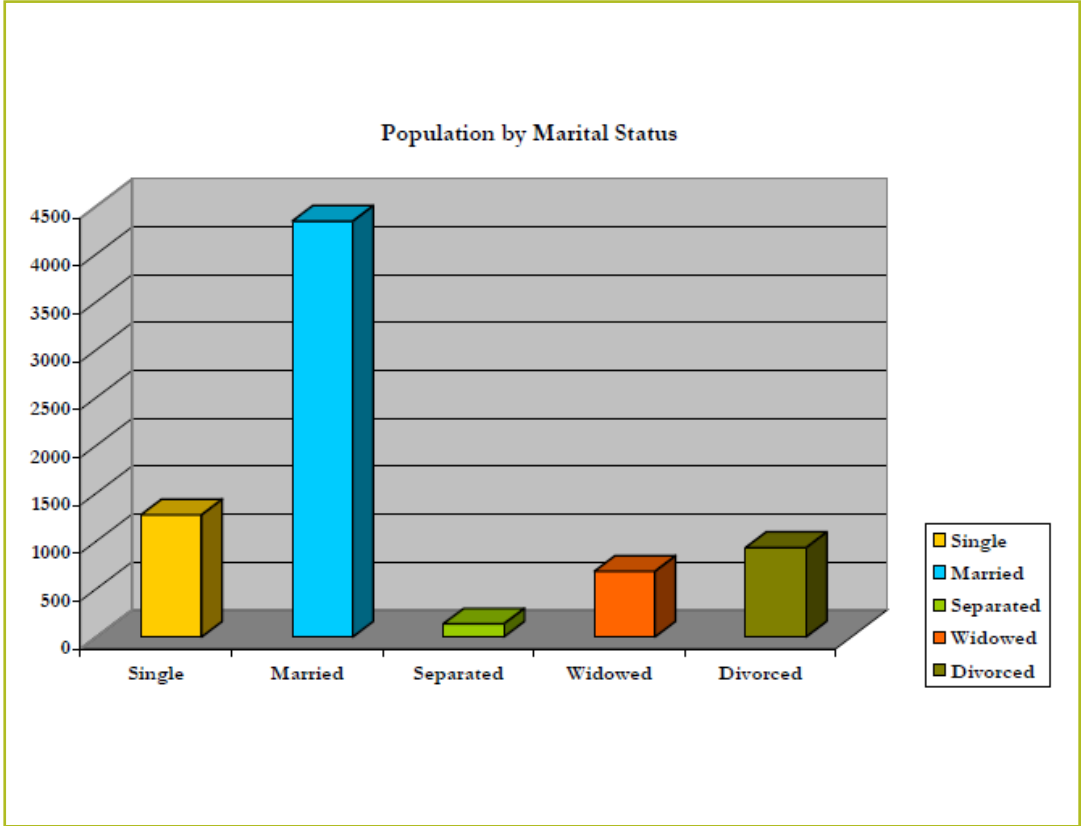
City of Azle	
Median Income:	\$43,304
Average Income:	\$53,125

Tarrant County	
Median Income:	\$46,179
Average Income:	\$60,112

Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex	
Median Income:	\$47,418
Average Income:	\$63,874

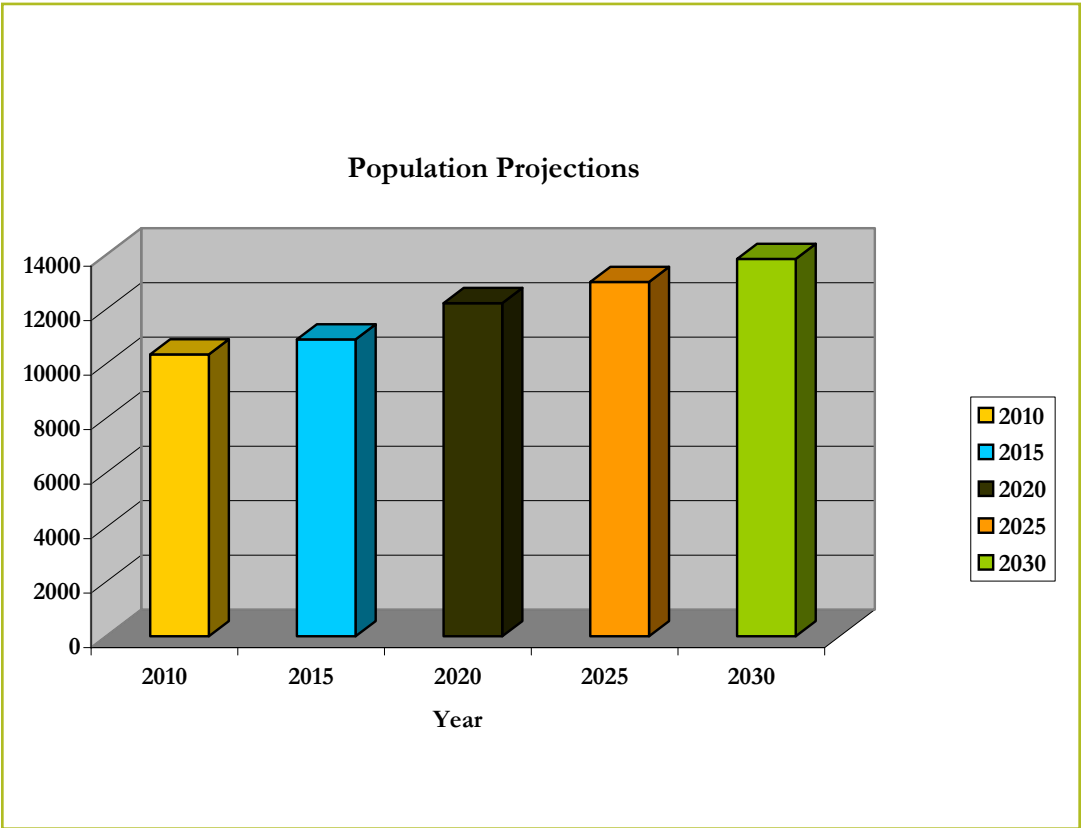
Total Population by Gender	
Male	4,416
Female	4,974

DEMOGRAPHICS



Total Population by Marital Status

Single	1,278
Married	4,349
Separated	138
Widowed	688
Divorced	936



Projections for all years were finalized in April 2003. While NCTCOG makes a meaningful effort to accurately estimate city-level population and employment projections, there may be instances where the current city population estimate has already surpassed a projection. This could be due to one or more factors.

## DOWNTOWN TODAY - CONTEXT

Today Downtown Azle and specifically Main Street, is a roadway in transition.

With the completion of SH199 east of town, Main Street now has a designation of State Spur 344. The resulting reduction in traffic count will allow for considerable rethink for future development and redevelopment.

Existing Main Street has two distinctive character sections. The southern portion, bounded by its intersection with the new SH199 access road, is the most visible portion of the corridor—at least when it comes to drive-by traffic on the freeway, since it is mostly at or a little below grade from SH 199. The northern portion of Main Street is more industrial in nature, and SH 199 is somewhat elevated at the intersection.

Most of the existing structures along Main Street are single story and set back from the street at varying depths. The current tenant mix is dominated by retail, service retail and office businesses with a mix of a few restaurants, medical office buildings and residences. There is no defined pedestrian accommodation—other than the dedicated sidewalk on the east side of the road north to Greenway—and little visual appeal. Overhead power lines dominate the view when you travel the street. Parking is limited throughout the corridor. Open green space exists only at the Central Park and adjacent to the two Churches at the corridor's southern end.

### TRANSPORTATION

The existing Main Street (State Spur 344) corridor from the intersection of the SH 199 access road to the south and then again at the northwest corner with SH 199 consists of one (1) distinct pavement cross section. The existing corridor primarily consists of bar ditches to convey storm water and does not include curb and gutter.

At the 2009 American Planning Association Conference in Minneapolis, one speaker recommended that Cities such as Azle seek to develop “Complete Streets”. Complete Streets are thoroughfares that are—

- Great places for people
- Places with a consistent level of design quality
- Places where design starts from the building face; it's defined by the doorway, not the roadway
- A form of civic art

### UTILITIES

#### *Water & Sanitary Sewer*

The existing Main Street corridor is served by both public water and sanitary sewer infrastructure maintained by the City of Azle Public Works Department. The water distribution and sanitary







sewer collection lines located within the study area are shown on Development Zone Map, included in Section Four of this report. The existing water and sanitary sewer lines were reviewed as part of the base data set and it appears that the corridor is adequately served with the existing infrastructure in place. Detailed system analysis and infrastructure master planning was not performed as part of this study. In the event that future re-development occurs along the Main Street corridor causing an increase to the current land use density—it is recommended that the City perform a detailed analysis of their existing water distribution and sanitary sewer collection systems to ensure adequate capacity is provided. This analysis shall be performed in accordance with the City’s current capital improvement and infrastructure master plans.

*Overhead Power Lines (Franchise Utilities)*

One of the significant obstacles for both re-development and beautification of the

Main Street corridor is the existence of the overhead power lines and utility poles that both parallel and cross the corridor in multiple locations. The relocation of the existing overhead power lines was discussed as part of the public charrette meetings. The consensus of the charrette participants was that the relocation of the overhead power lines is a critical component to the overall revitalization of the Main Street corridor.

**DRAINAGE**

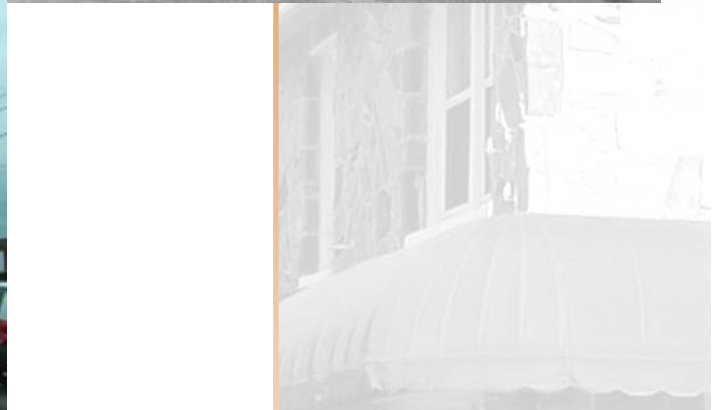
The existing drainage conditions and bar ditch cross section currently limits the extent to which the pedestrian mobility and urbanization can be improved along the Main Street corridor. The existing drainage patterns and infrastructure were reviewed based on 2-foot topography and aerial orthography provided as part of the base data set. A detailed drainage analysis was not performed and the descriptions and recommendations provided in this section shall be utilized for conceptual planning purposes only.



## DOWNTOWN TODAY - CONTEXT

### Visual

- Lots of power lines
- Focused on the automobile
- Little, if any, landscaping
- No continuity
- No place definition



### Section Two



## DOWNTOWN TODAY - CONTEXT

### Walkability

- No connected system for pedestrian traffic
- Little visual appeal

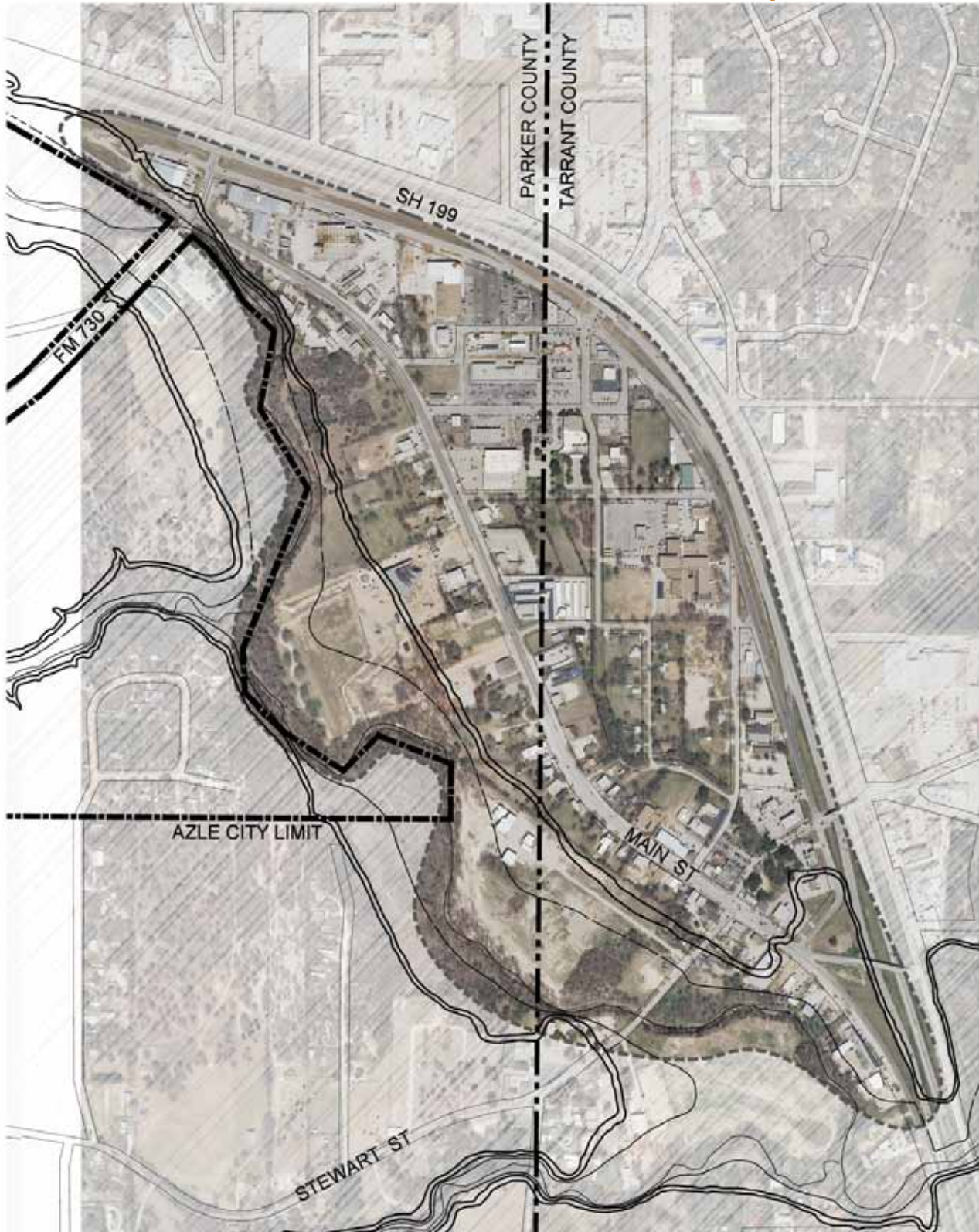


### Section Two



## INVENTORY MAPS

### Aerial Base Map

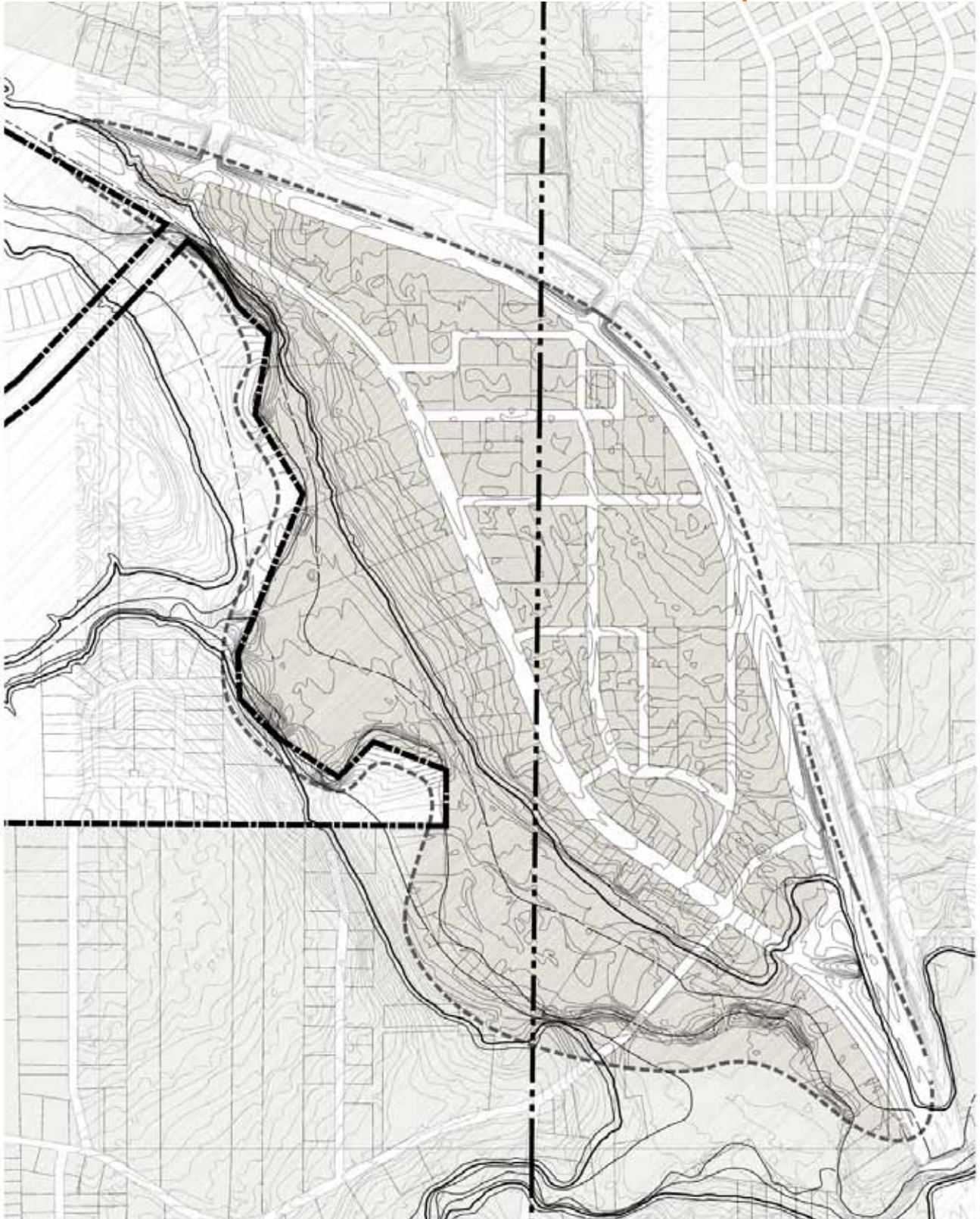


### Section Two



## INVENTORY MAPS

### Topographic Base Map

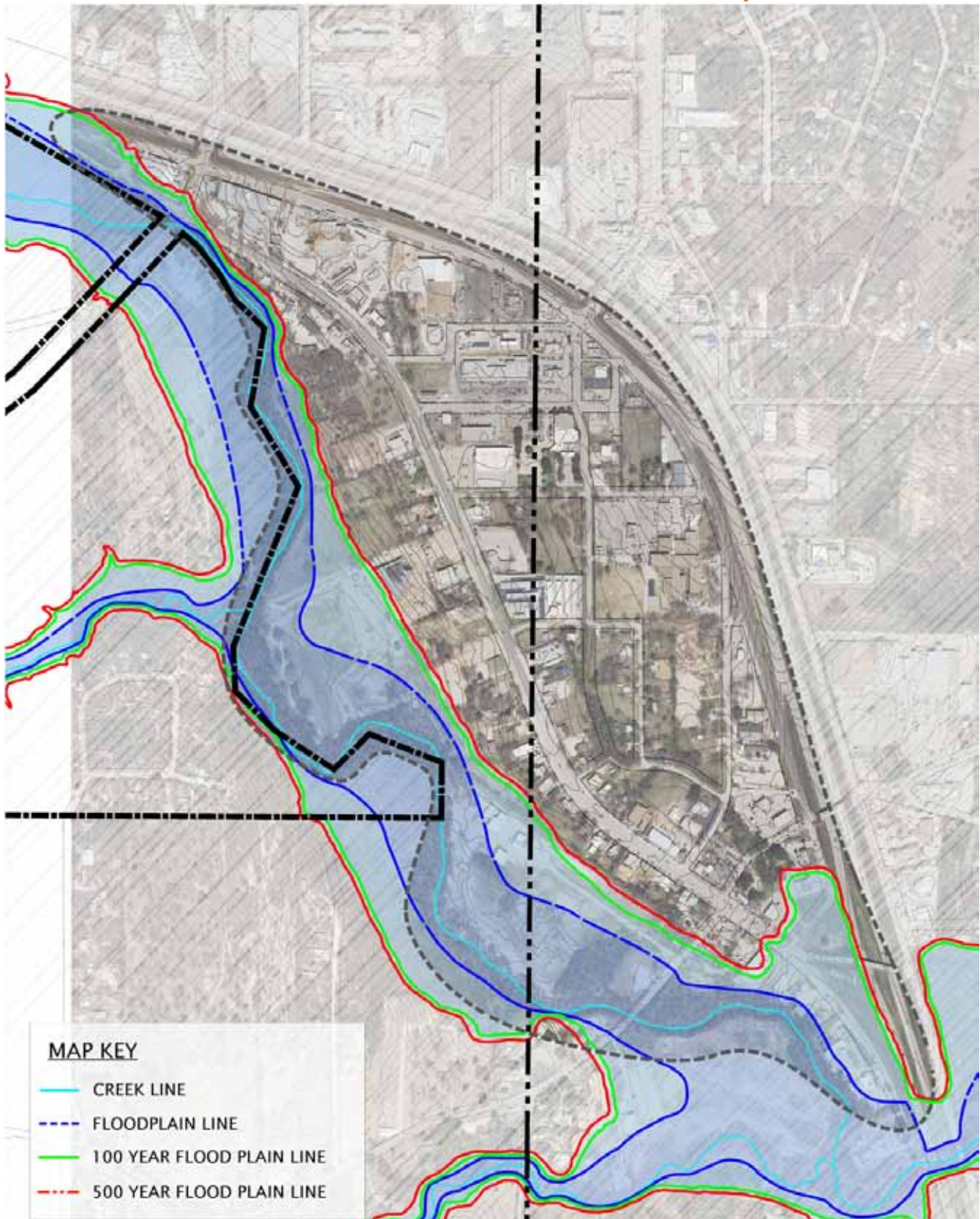


#### Section Two



<h1>INVENTORY MAPS</h1> <h2>Open Land Study Map</h2>	
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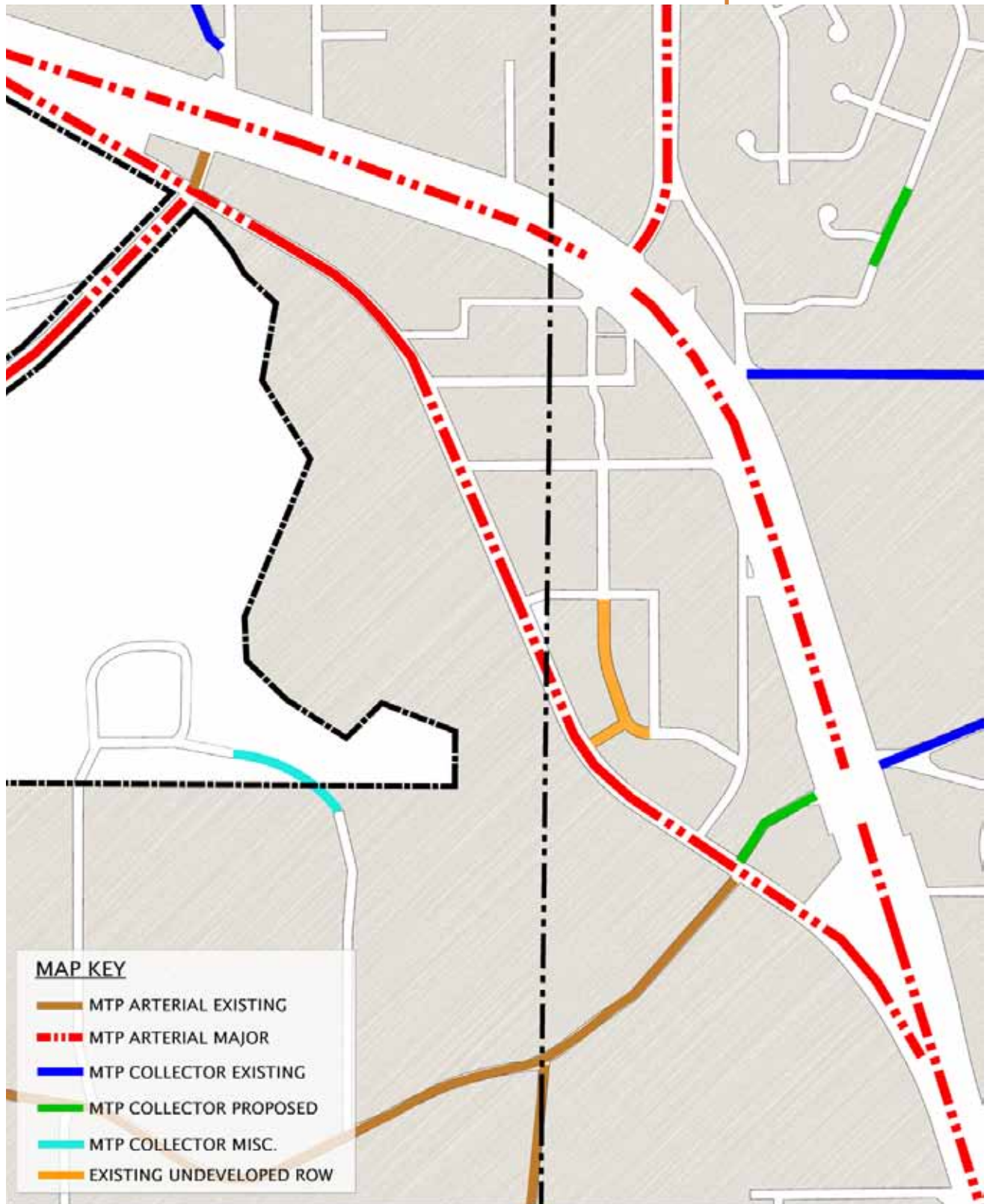
## Open Land Study Map





## INVENTORY MAPS

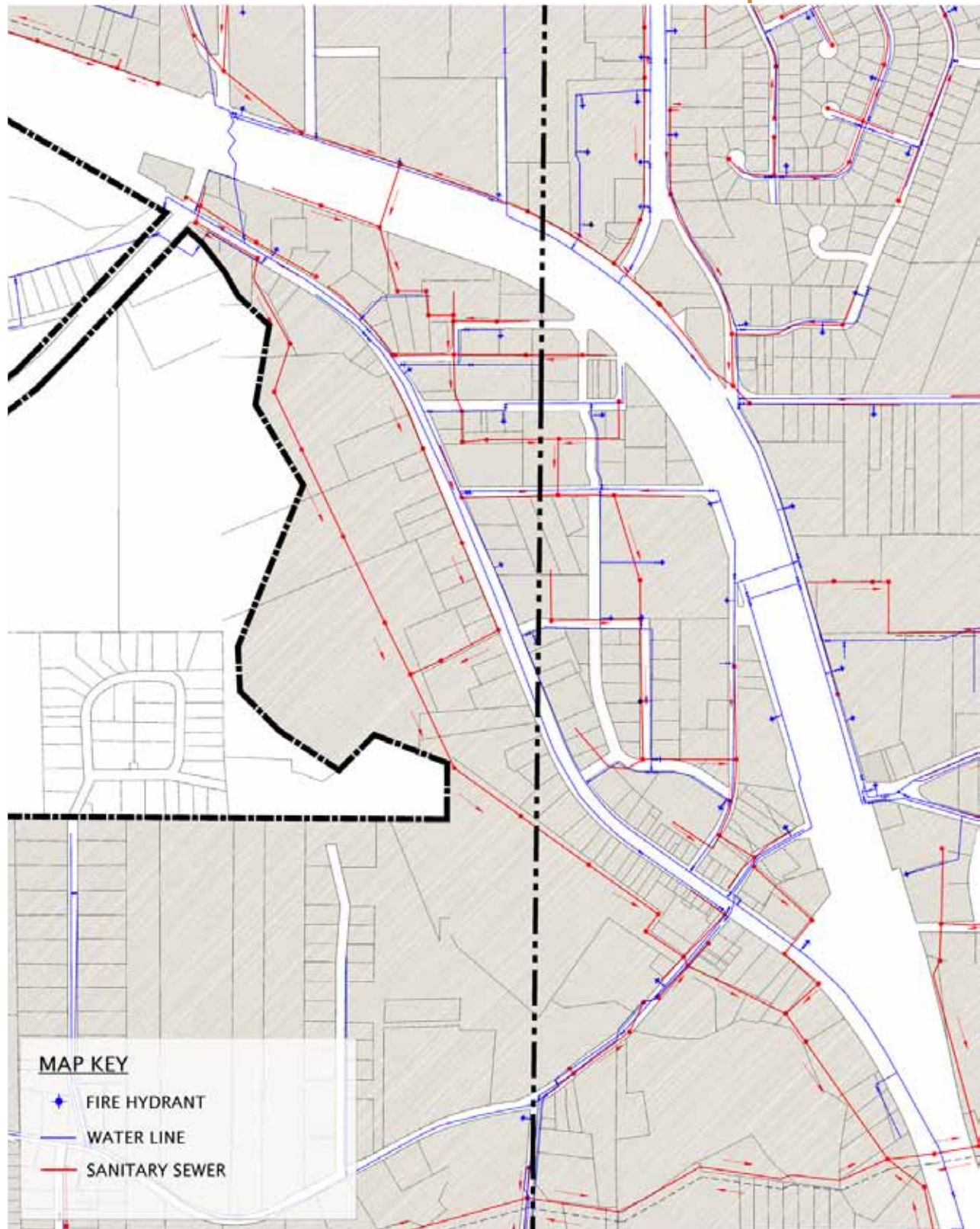
### Thoroughfare Base Map



### Section Two

## INVENTORY MAPS

### Utility Base Map

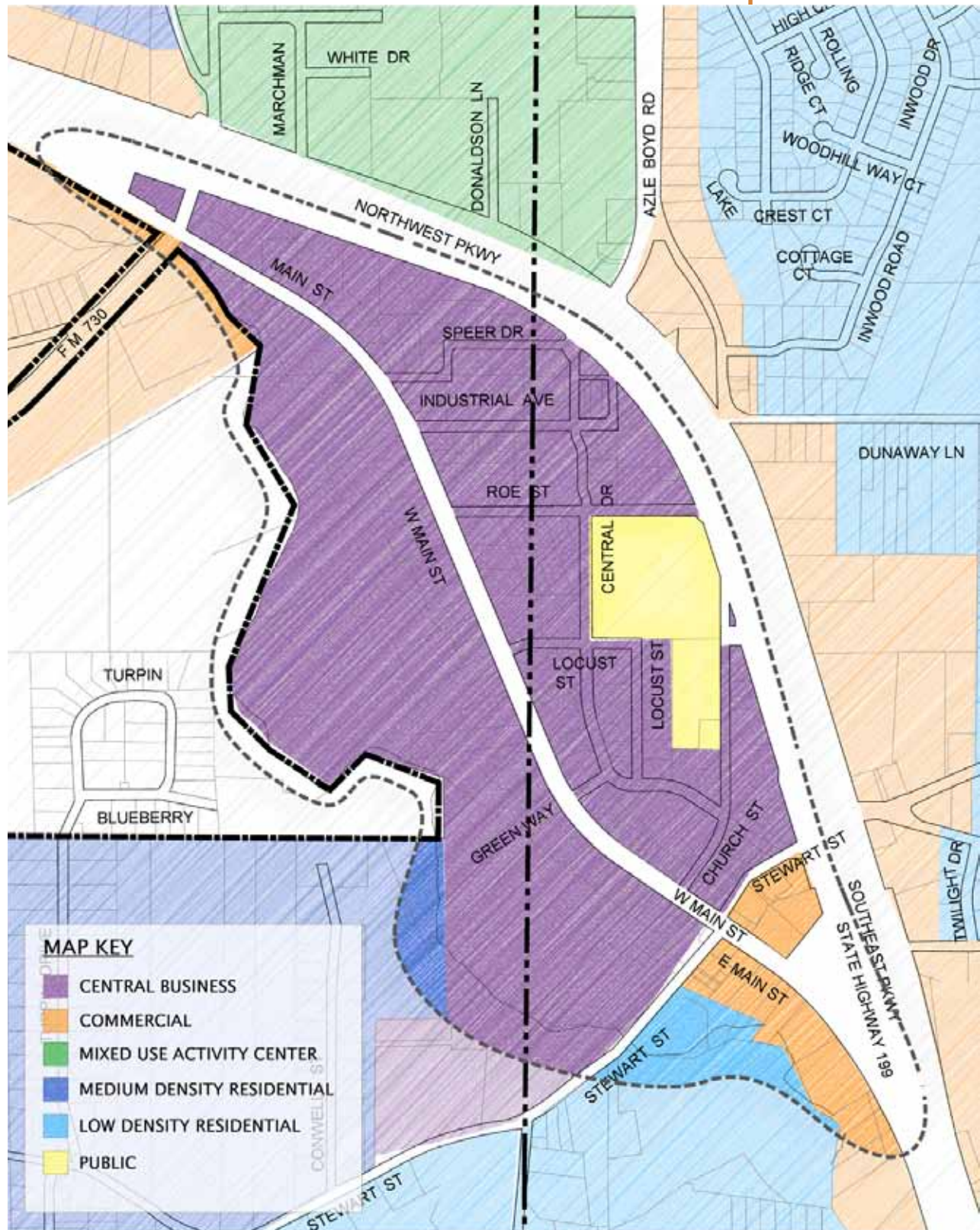


### Section Two



## INVENTORY MAPS

### Land Use Base Map

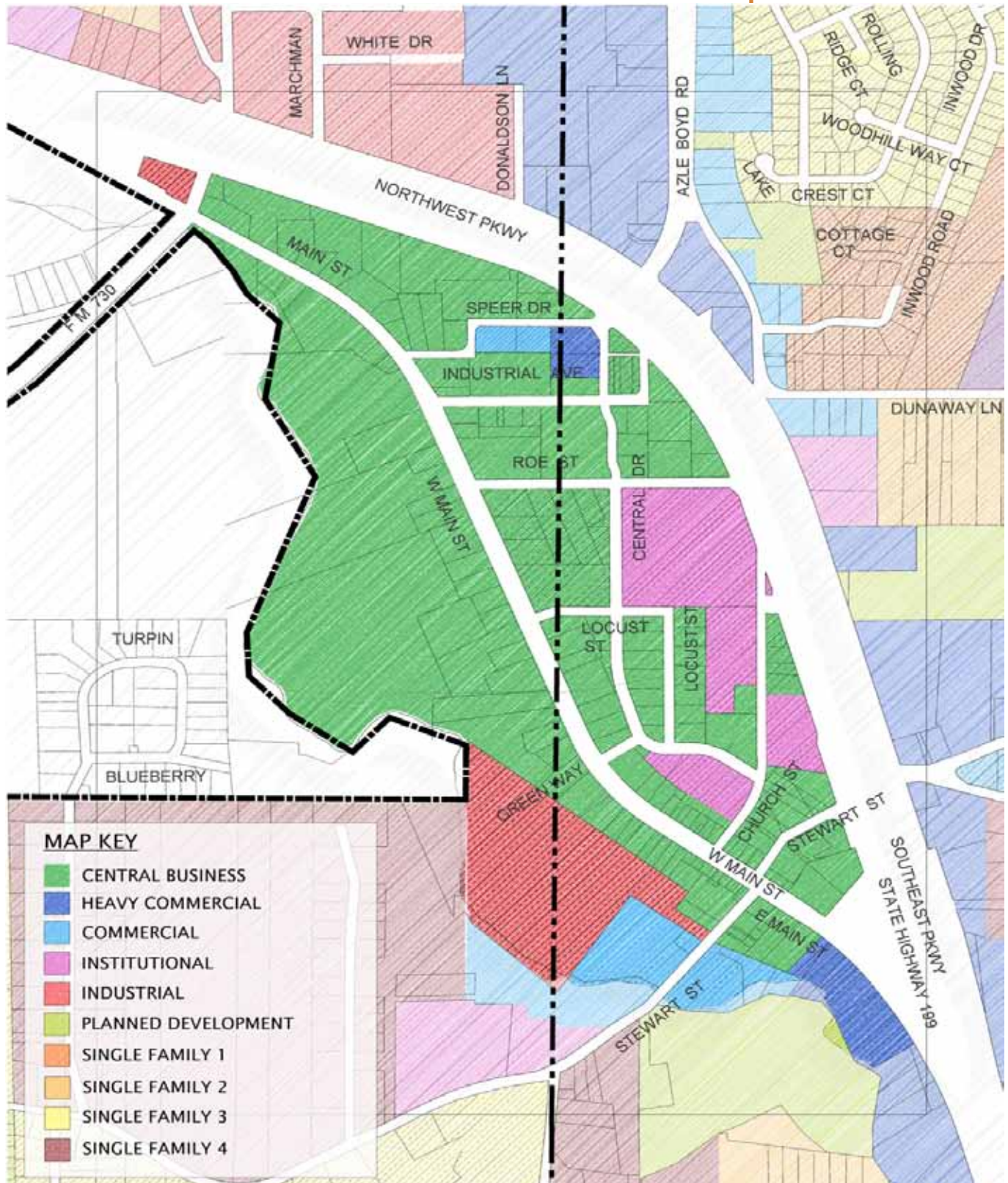


### Section Two



## INVENTORY MAPS

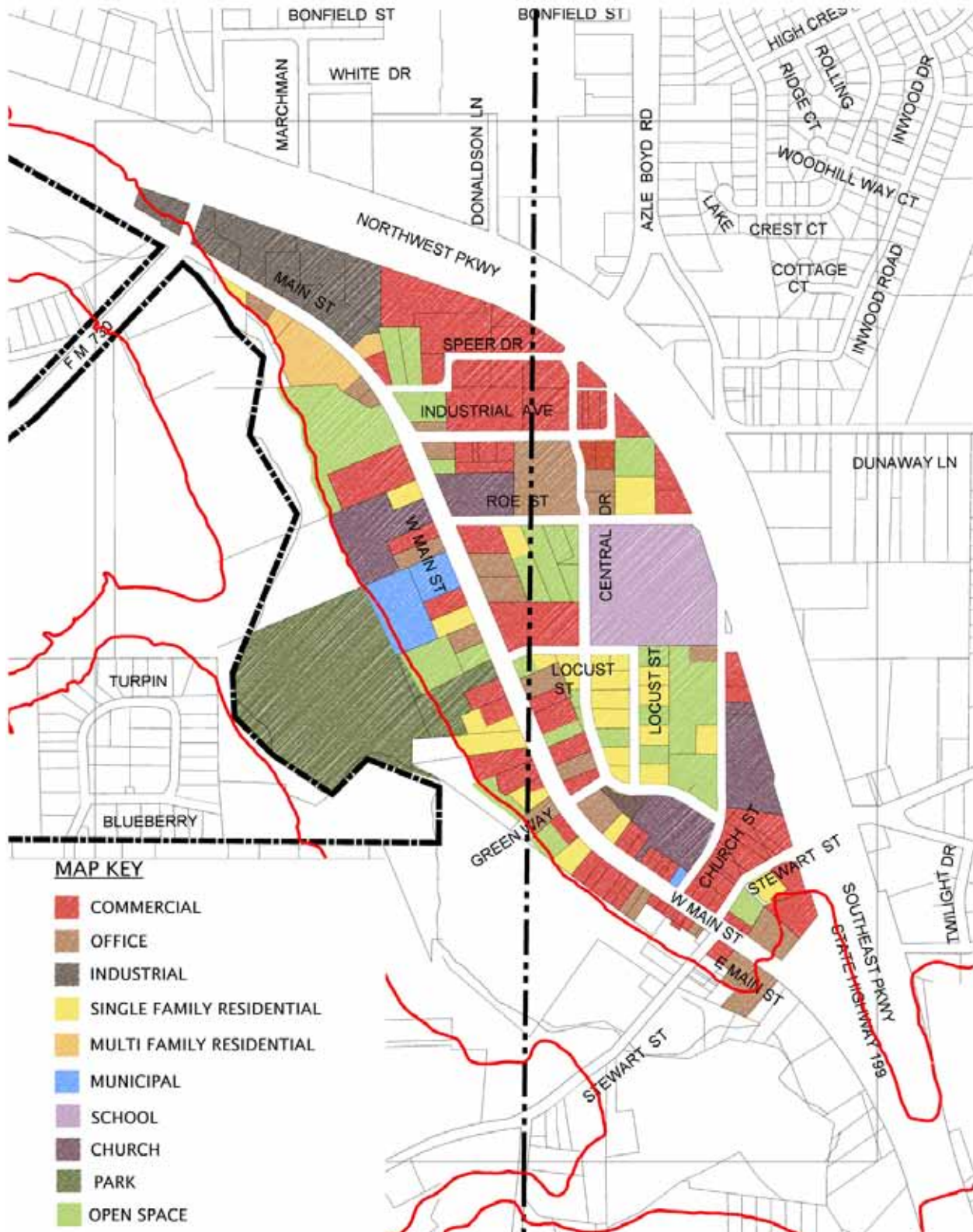
### Zoning Base Map





## ANALYSIS MAPS

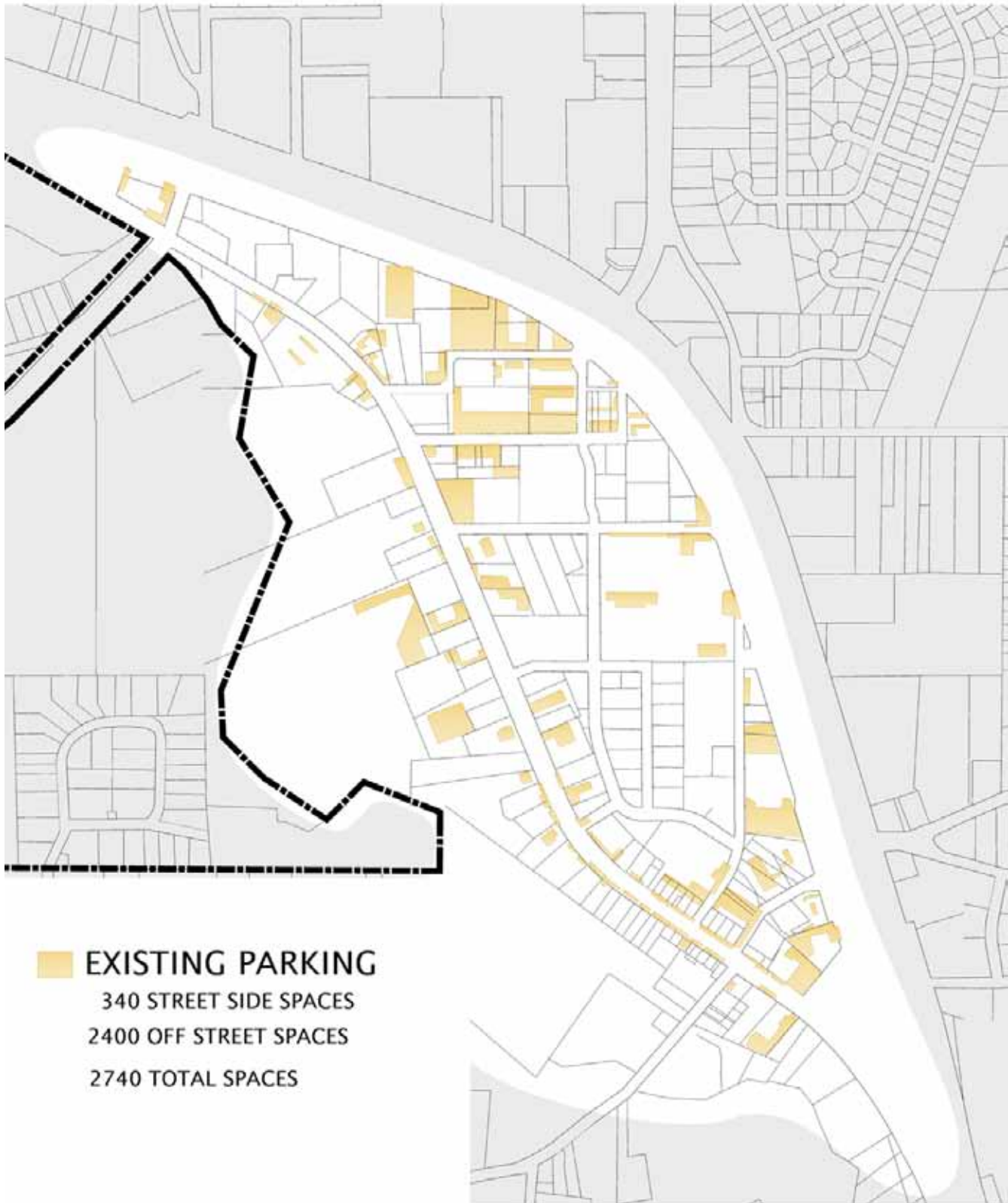
### Detail Land Use Map



### Section Two

ANALYSIS MAPS

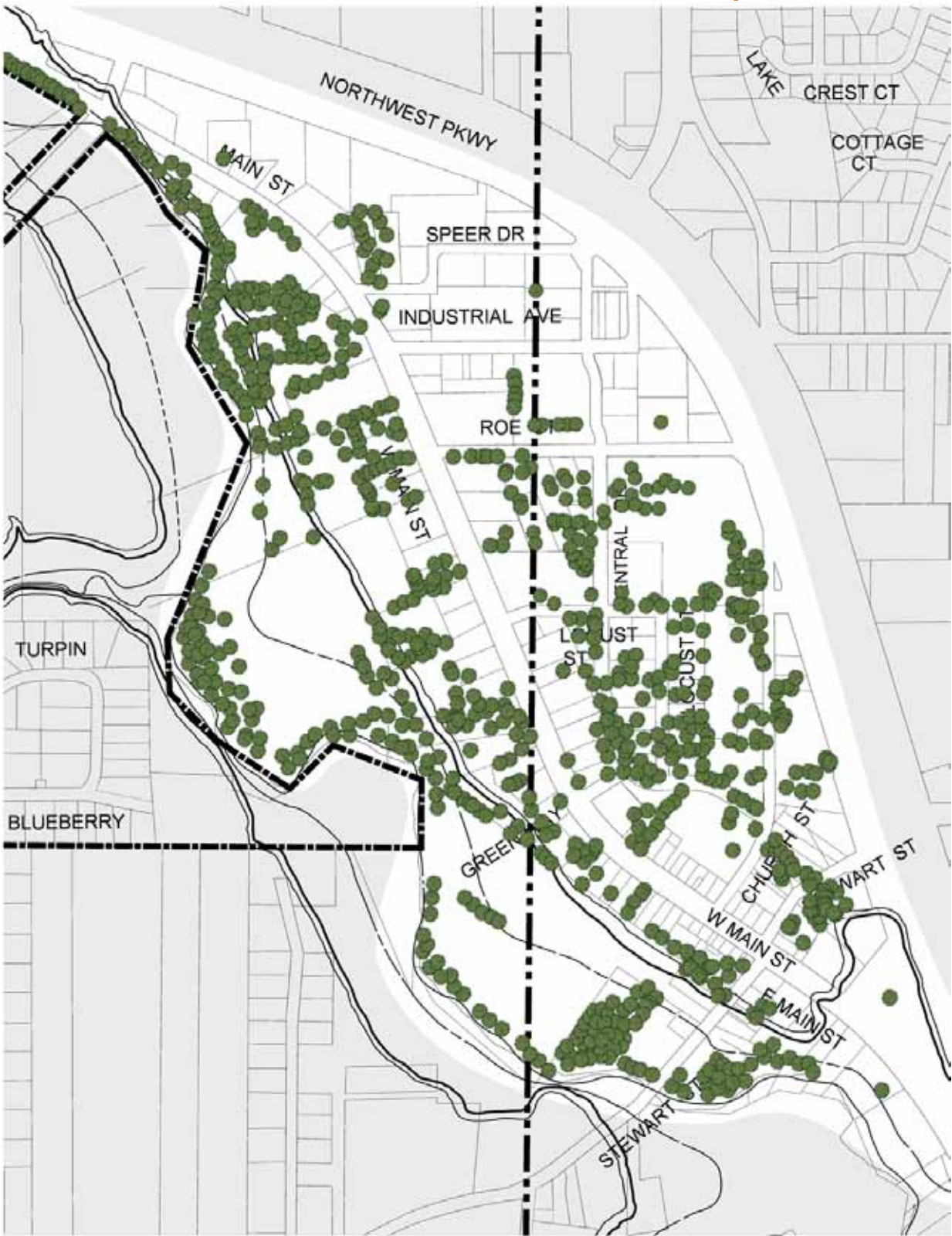
Existing Parking Map





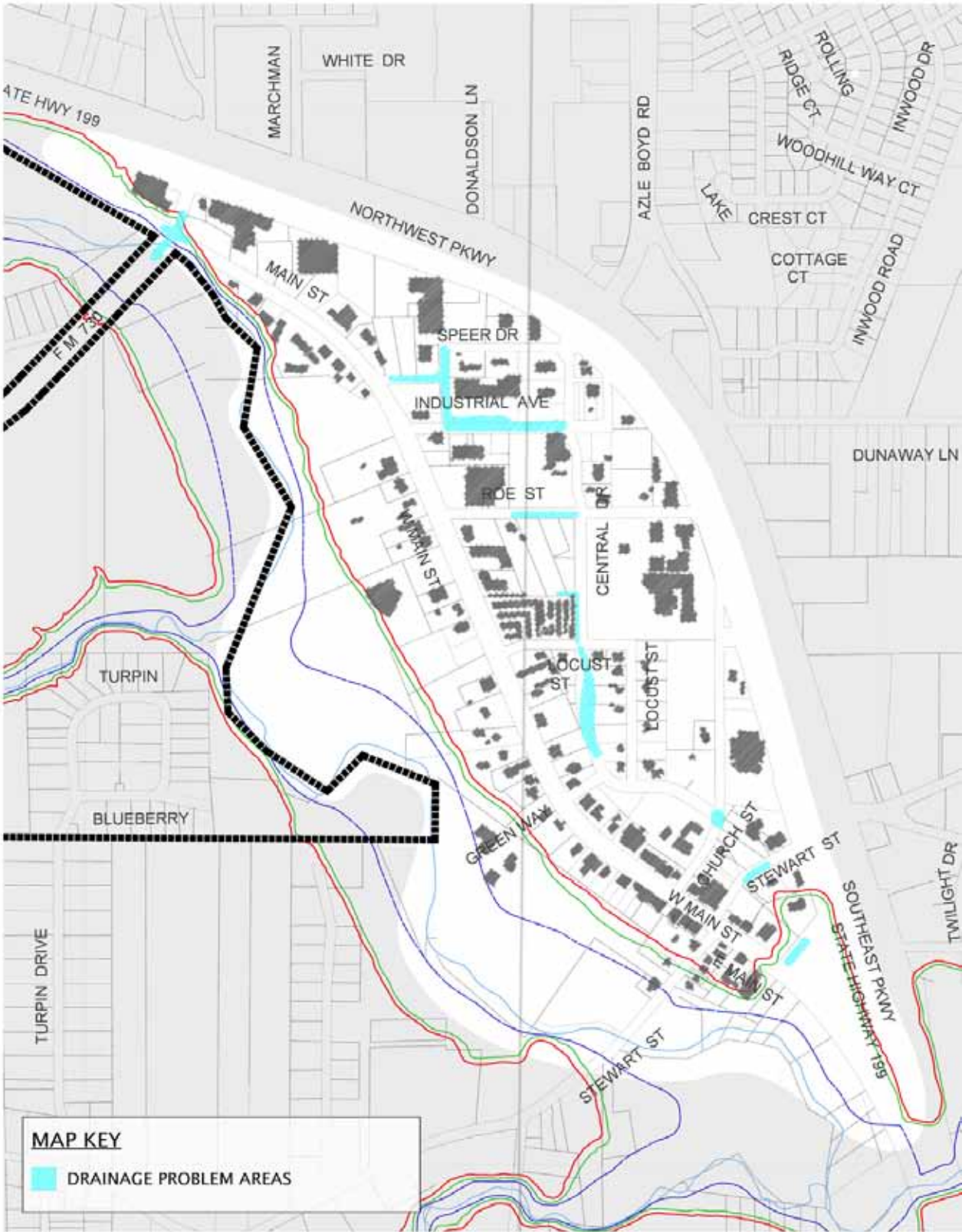
ANALYSIS MAPS

Tree Canopy



ANALYSIS MAPS

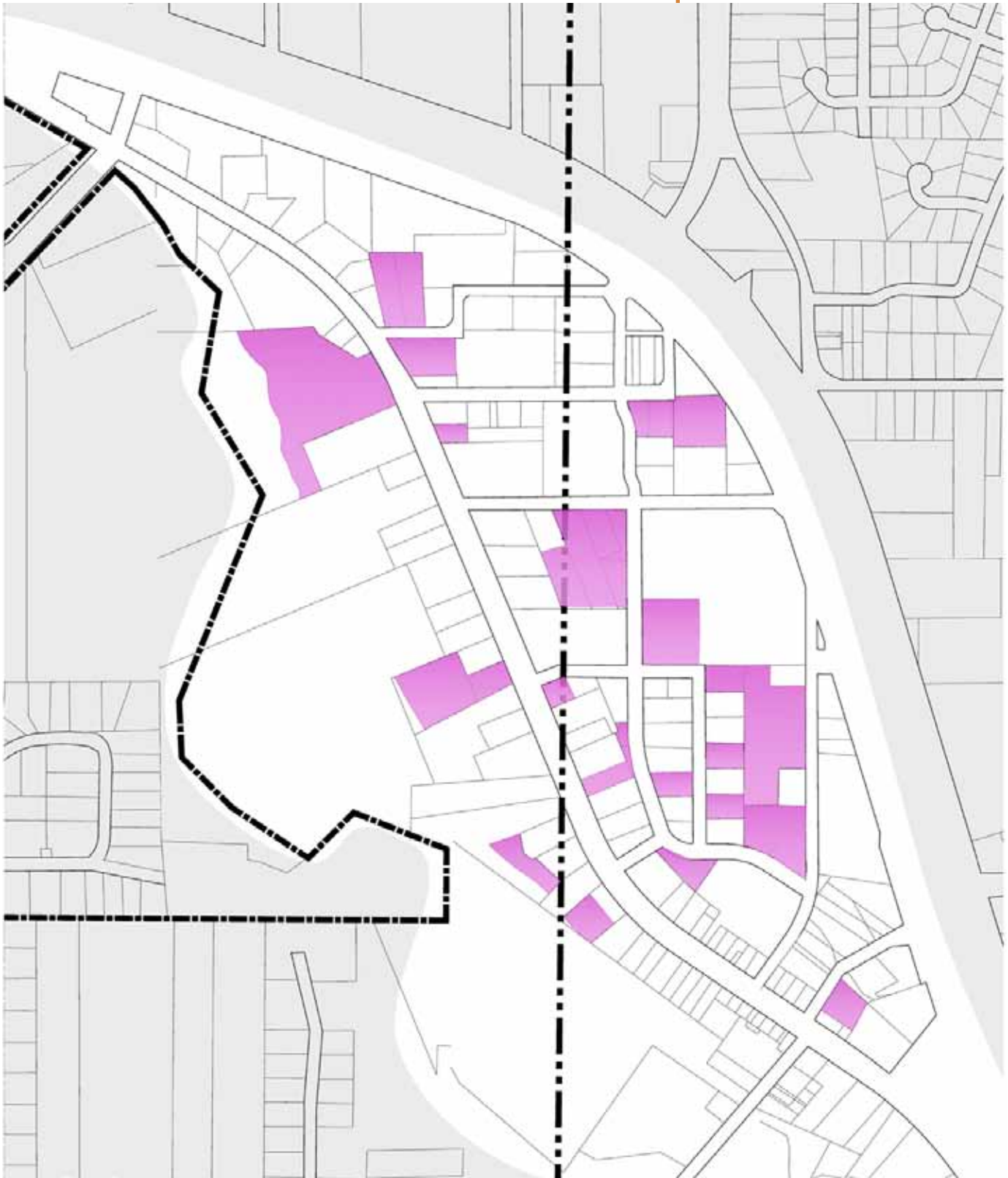
Drainage Problem Area





ANALYSIS MAPS

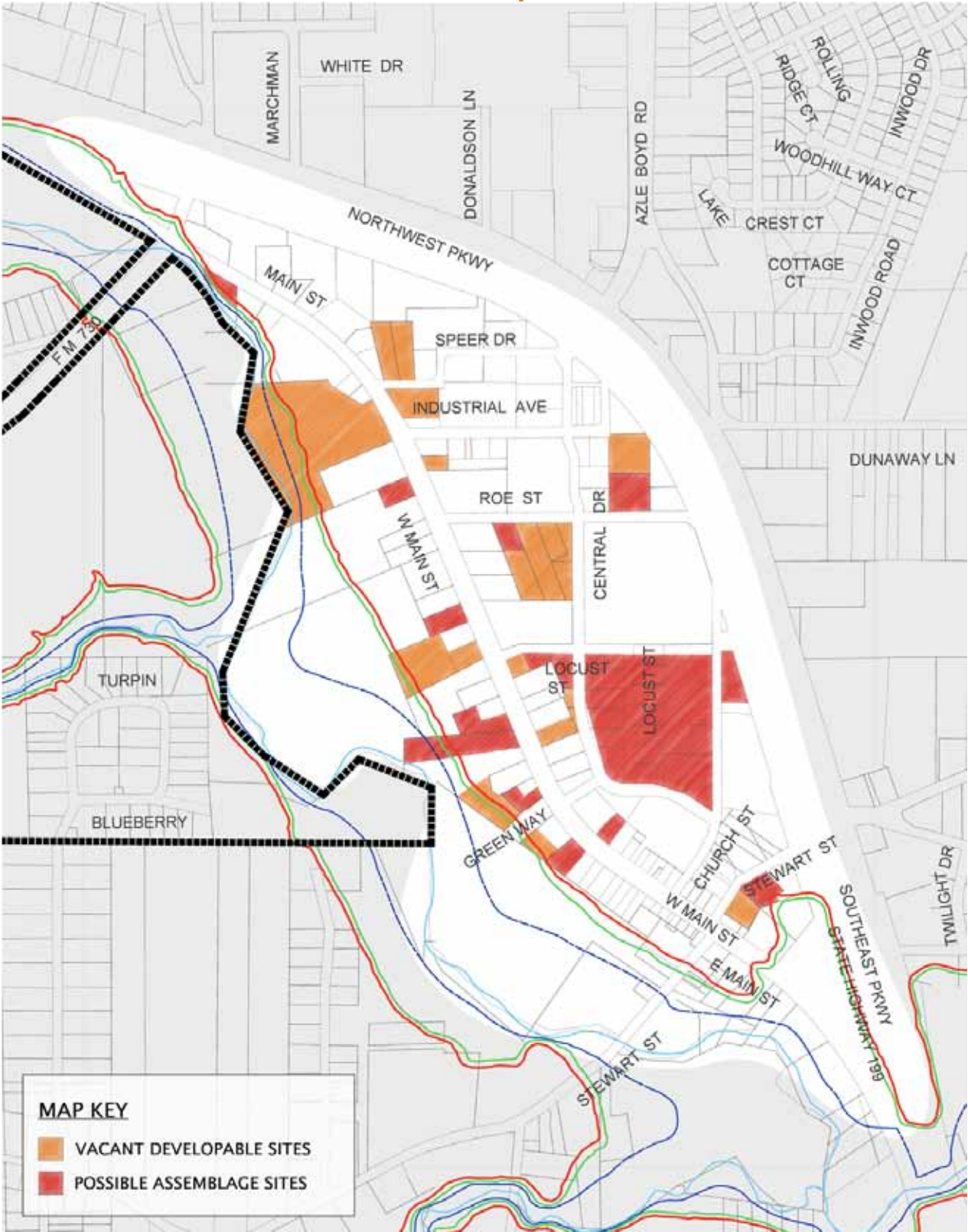
Open Land Study Map





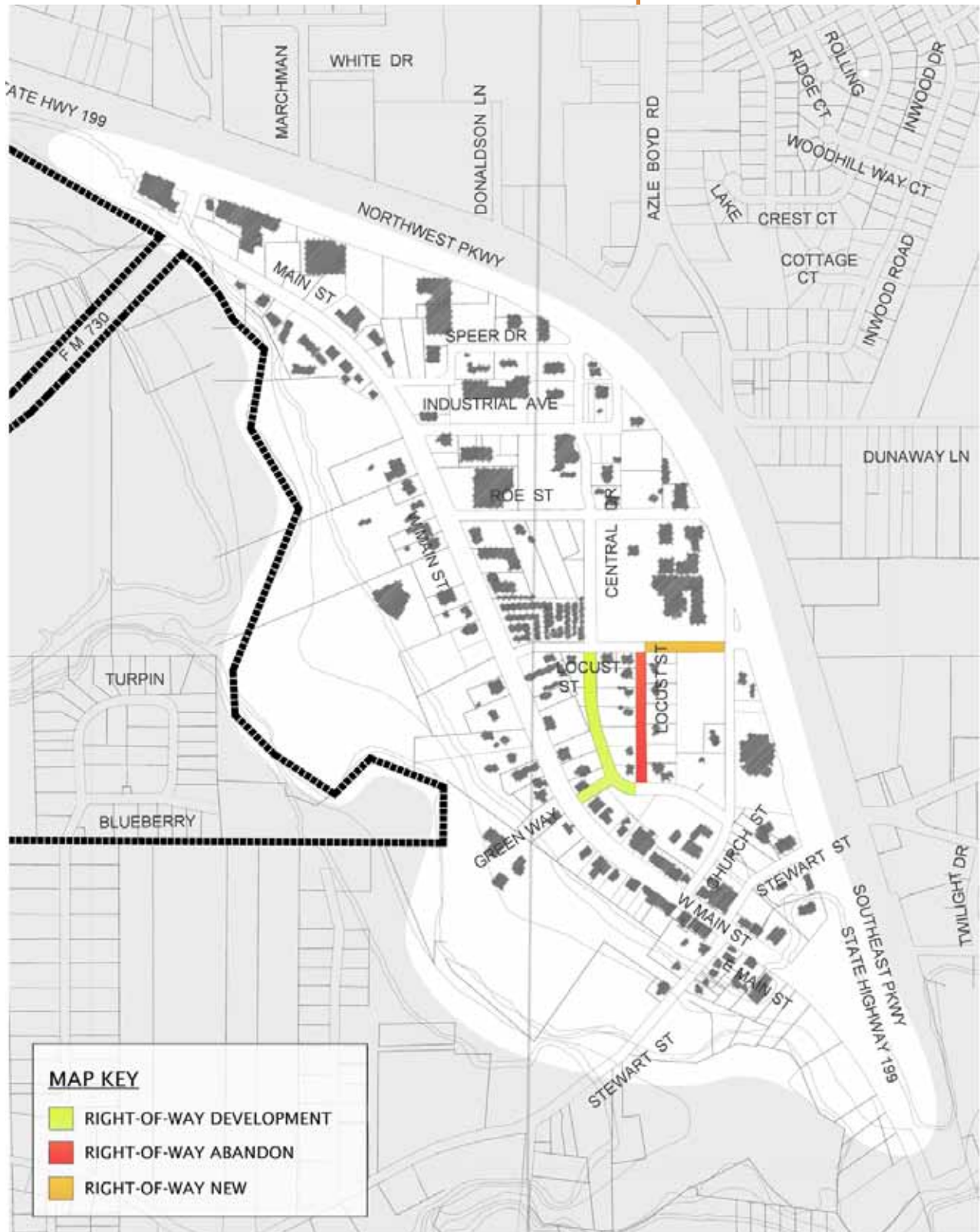
ANALYSIS MAPS

Redevelopment Target Sites



## ANALYSIS MAPS

### Proposed Right Of Way

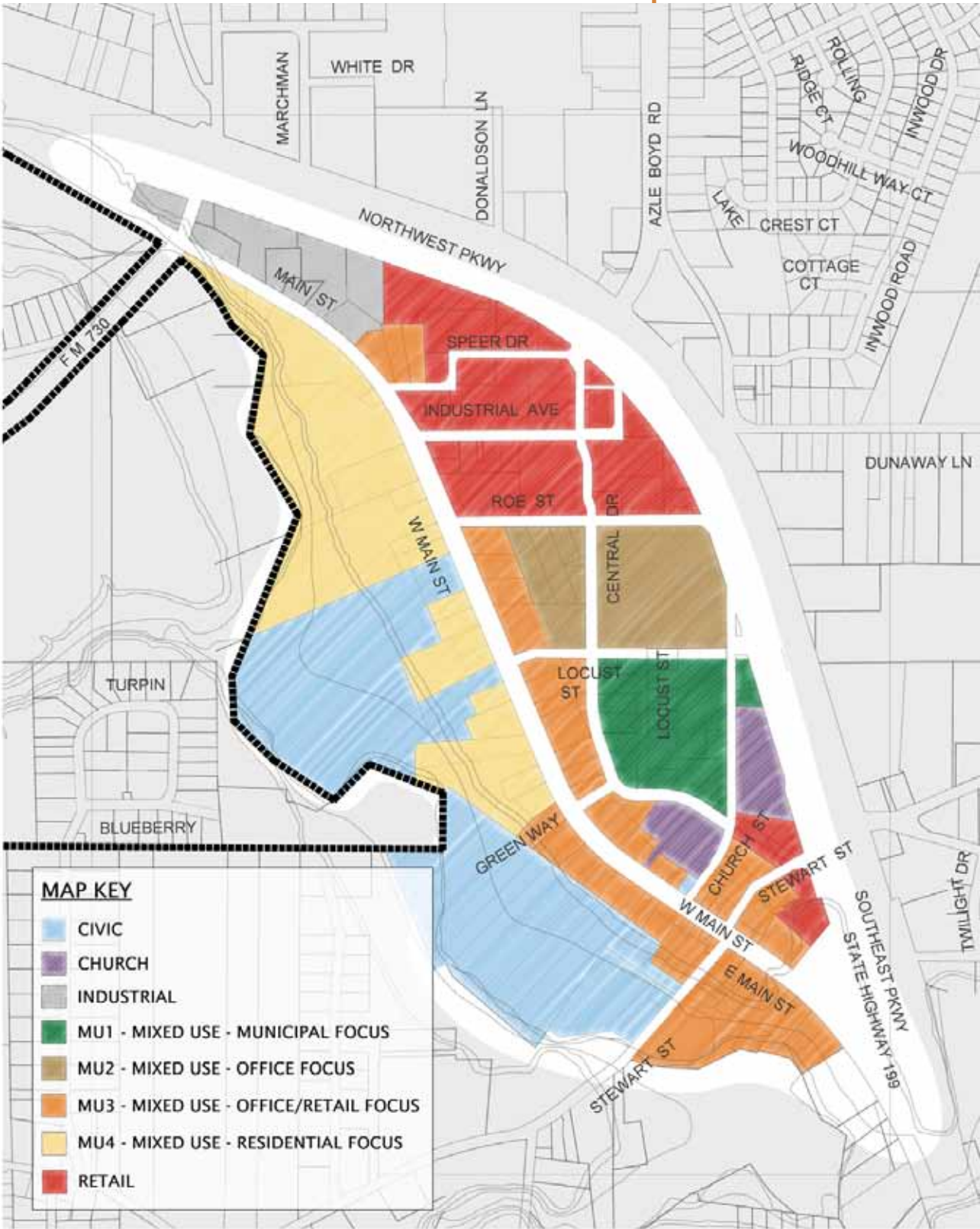


### Section Two



ANALYSIS MAPS

Future Land Use Map

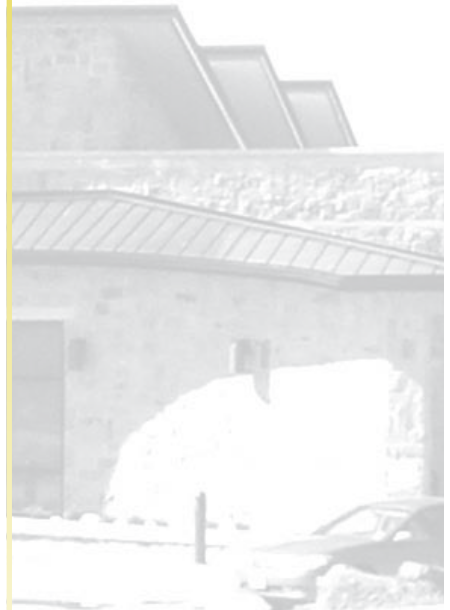




## PUBLIC INPUT

The group reviewed this list and continued to brainstorm ideas and elements, including the community's input resulting in the following primary desires and concerns, categorized into four distinctive areas:

- Utility
- Visual
- Place-Making
- Planning



## OBSTACLES & OPPORTUNITIES

Through our information gathering effort, we identified some key issues that could be obstacles for implementing the vision for Main Street. We also identified several opportunities on which Azle could capitalize.

### Obstacles

Participants listed several items, including—

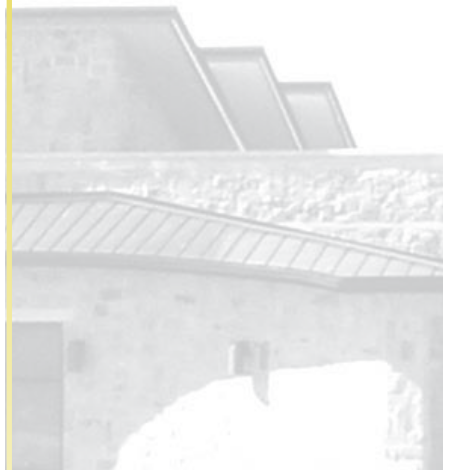
- Parking: Especially on the south end of Main Street. “One of the main things is the parking. That will deter anyone from doing business. They block us in, with the drive through that we have. They don’t have access. Parking is really going to put a squash on anything if they have to come and go very quickly.”
- Flooding: “The flooding and the parking. It’s like a little river (when it rains).”
- Signage: “Especially for rental tenants”, “Could it be closer to the street?”
- Large number of trucks & drilling rigs: “Maybe we could get the State to post ‘truck route’” or tell them to come down Commerce instead of Lotus to get back to FM730 South. “A big sign at Commerce that says FM730 South.”
- Confusion: Apparently searches for Main Street on MapQuest yields directions to Main Street in neighboring Reno.
- Transportation: Particularly for the elderly—and for connecting the two ends of Main Street. “Right now it’s like two separate things. There’s got to be a way to tie those two together.” Someone suggested shuttles up Main to Commerce. “Not just public transportation, but some

kind of novelty.”

- Dry status in Parker County precinct: “That puts a squash on restaurants. That’s an issue.”
- Festivals spread over large parcels/areas: “Festivals need to be compact.”
- Air quality near Azle Elementary: “Auto emissions aren’t good there now; when the road (SH199) is moved [widened], it will be even worse.”
- School buildings and facilities: “Are we stuck with the school buildings? It throws a monkey-wrench in the whole set up. So long as it’s a school and a parking lot for buses, it’s a big hindrance.”
- Dilapidated buildings
- Lack of a core: “There is no hub or central focus in the City.”
- Retail (or lack thereof): “There are a few empty places. If we had a few more cute boutique retailers, it would be nice.”
- The status quo: “There needs to be a change in the mindset of people that we want Azle to grow, for everyone to buy in.”

### Opportunities

Based on what was said and received over five separate meetings, GSBS recommends that the City begin considering a number of opportunities for the Main Street/Downtown Area:





### *Short-term/More Immediate*

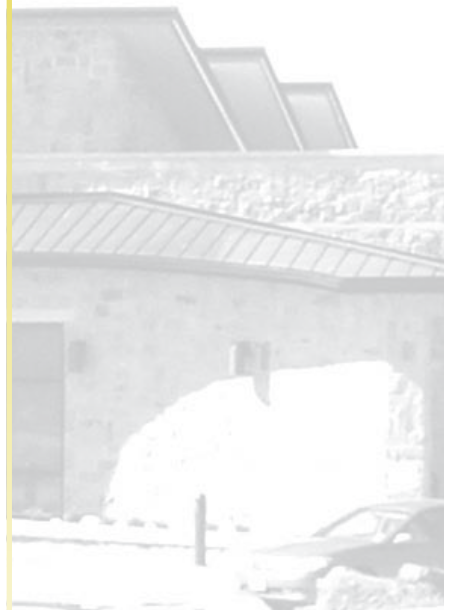
- Contact MapQuest and notify them of their error in identifying Azle's Downtown. Work with them to ensure that information is corrected, to the benefit of Azle businesses.
- Buy a vacant parcel and fund improvements to make a new Parking Lot—to relieve the difficult parking situation for businesses on the south end of Main Street.
- Work in partnership with the Chamber to foster a Downtown association to establish and enforce property standards and pursue grants as a 501(C)3 organization.

### *Long-term*

- Renew discussions with the Texas Department of Transportation to take over operation and maintenance of Main Street. Appeal to the Department's new regulations governing highways which run through commercial areas as reasons for the Fort Worth District to work with the City to maximize the road's redesign and improvement before dedication to Azle.
- Study placing the City's eventual new City Hall in the Downtown area; such a facility will help serve as a public anchor. In tandem with the Azle ISD's headquarters, it could place two of the City's largest employers within walking distance of Downtown retailers, restaurants and business establishments.



- In a related vein, encourage the AISD to renew plans to consolidate their Administrative functions at the historic Rock School—and to move Azle Elementary to another site.
- Likewise suggest that the AISD consider relocating its Bus Barn fleet facility, to open up opportunities for more amenable Downtown development on the present site.
- Study the idea of creating a Town Green between the Rock School and Downtown, so Azle has a dedicated site for festivals and annual City events (i.e. Christmas Tree lighting, Fourth of July Fireworks, etc.) Such a space would also help safely foster festivals without having to close off more major commercial streets or arterials on the perimeter of the Downtown area.
- Recommend that the Chamber relocate its headquarters to a more notable

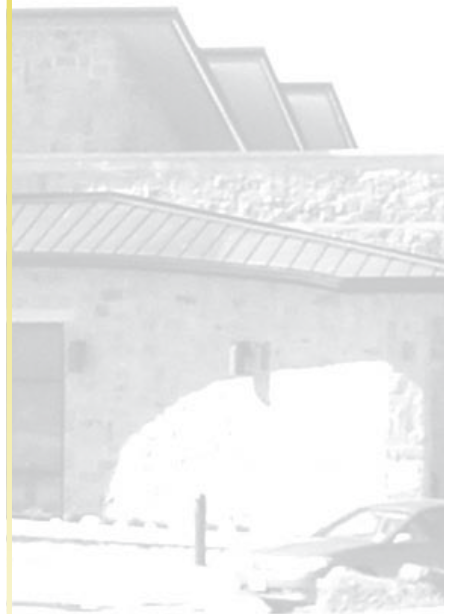


place—perhaps even in a historic building. (As one participated put it, “That’s not a very good location [where they are now].”)

- Consider working in partnership with the Azle ISD to fund and construct an Assembly Hall to be jointly used by both entities and other political jurisdictions and representatives.
- Annex acreage to the west of Downtown (“Are there any plans to annex additional land to the west of Downtown? It would be a crime not to be able to control the wooded area west of the creek [near the Library].”)
- Create a set of Design Guidelines governing the look of construction in the Downtown area. Create an

Architectural Review Commission (comprised of interested Downtown business owners and operators appointed by the City Council) to oversee review and implementation of the Design Guidelines.

- Explore possibility of creating a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) to help fund needed infrastructure improvements.
- Consider following the lead of other Cities which are providing matching grants to businesses and building owners who improve building facades. Likewise study the option of considering Chapter 380 tax rebates to new retailers and restaurants that locate within the Downtown District.



### Section Three



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### UTILITY

#### *Improve Drainage*

Accommodations must be made to improve the drainage situation, minimizing the amount of conflicts with vehicles and pedestrians. The ideal way to improve the existing situation is to plan for reconstruction of the Main Street road section with curbs and gutters. Underground storm water collection and transmission should be provided to remove the bar ditch and culverts that currently exist.

#### *Clean Up Power Lines*

The existing power line network should be evaluated to eliminate as many overhead lines as possible. The best case scenario would be to take all of the lines underground, eliminating them from the visual corridor. The second alternative would be to relocate the lines that currently run parallel to Main Street placing the lines behind the buildings, in alley ways or on secondary streets.

The justifications for this effort are two-fold. One, there is an expressed desire to improve the visual appearance of the Main Street corridor through the introduction of landscaping. Large overstory canopy trees lining Main Street will have a beneficial effect on the aesthetics as well as providing shade for pedestrians. This also increases the likelihood that pedestrians will desire to spend time on Main Street. It is unlikely that 100% of the power lines will be able to be relocated, so priority should be placed on

relocating the lines that run parallel to Main Street, creating the environment necessary for the trees to mature without the severe pruning normally performed around power lines.

#### *Improve Walkability*

Develop a system of defined, linked pedestrian ways to provide a continuous uninterrupted pedestrian pathway all along both sides of Main Street—and especially integrated into the Downtown properties between Main and SH 199. This will likely include a combination of sidewalk sections, expanded front stoop areas in front of buildings and plaza spaces. The entire system should be linked with logical, clear connections to an adjacent pedestrian path. The pedestrian path may include accommodations for side walk retail sales, dining, seating, landscape plantings and other appropriate streetscape furnishings. The passageway should accommodate a minimum five foot width in all locations regardless of the adjacent amenities. Specialty paving including brick pavers, stained concrete, textured concrete or other similar materials should be used to accent and draw attention to the path way.

#### *Parking*

The aggregate



existing parking availability within the study area is for the most part adequate, but parking in the southern portion of the corridor is lacking. Street side parking should eventually be encouraged along Main Street—especially if and when an agreement is struck with TxDOT—but will not be adequate to support an increase in density of development. It is recommended that the City explore the possibility of acquiring or encouraging private development to install one or more public parking lots behind the buildings along Main Street, increasing the available parking, especially near the retail and restaurants at the southern tip.

## VISUAL

### *Landscaping*

As previously discussed, the introduction of large overstory canopy trees is recommended along the east and west sides of Main Street to provide shade and greenery for pedestrians. Root zone accommodations in the way of open planters is encouraged at intersections and at mid block islands. Street trees in tree wells with grates may be utilized as long as adequate soil media, irrigation and drainage accommodations are made. The use of a soil aggregate system equivalent to “CU Soil” should be utilized wherever open planters are not feasible to allow for adequate root growth. This will minimize the potential for sidewalk disruption due to root growth. Tree selection should be limited to Texas Native species that will tolerate the local climate and micro climate conditions that exist in the region. Sections of like-species trees should be dictated to



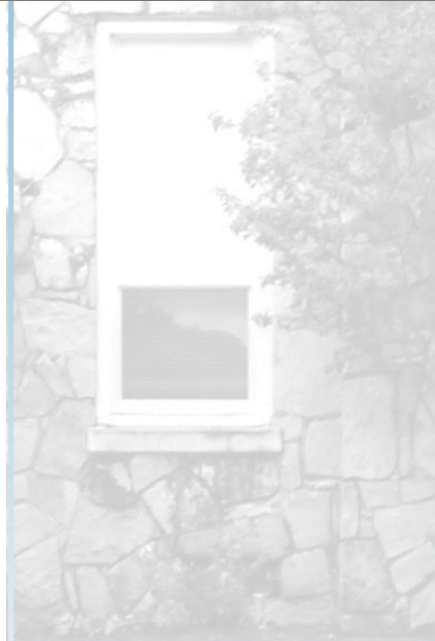
give identity to specific blocks or sections of Main Street. Some diversity in tree selection is encouraged to prevent a monoculture. A mix of shrubs, groundcover, native grasses, perennials and annuals is encouraged for additional plantings where applicable. Again, the use of Texas Native and adaptive species is encouraged. All plantings introduced in this corridor should be irrigated with an automated system utilizing drip technologies wherever possible.

### *Identity for the Corridor*

The community identity and place making for Main Street is important and should include elements such as thematic utility and light signal poles, interchangeable banners, consistent style of street furnishings, specialty paving systems and iconic gateway entry elements, particularly at the southern edge in SH 199 right of way.

### *Existing Parking Lot Enhancements*

Wherever possible, existing parking lots



**“Place must no longer be hidden under the table when we do community visioning.”**

**~ Troy Russ, Director of Urban Design, Glatting Jackson/Atlanta**

## Section Four



that are visible from Main Street should be enhanced to include landscape islands with trees and other landscaping. Irrigation to these islands should be included.

## PLACE-MAKING

There is a desire for Main Street to be a “great place” where the community can interact. There is no magic formula for creating “place”, but rather it is a process that requires citizens to communicate, envision, create and dwell with each other. As referenced previously, the premise that “people support what they help to create” is vital to the success of a place-making. The process taken to develop this report is an example of this and is a good start towards Main Street becoming a great “place” in Azle. Continued effort on the part of community leaders, along with citizen participation and involvement at every level of the process, will encourage this action. Azle has a real opportunity to maintain communication and continue the current momentum in creating a great Main Street.

### *Circulation for Pedestrians – Safety*

Pedestrian safety is essential. Safe passage from one property to another and across the street must be accommodated in the design. One way this can be accomplished is using enhanced crosswalks and islands that can minimize the travel distance required for street crossings. Additional safety could be provided by elements of separation for the pedestrian zone to the vehicular travel way with combinations of street side parking, planters and other barrier elements is



another way to improve pedestrian safety. Street trees in this barrier zone could provide shade for the pedestrian zone and a portion of the street. The key to these methods is to have a logical, discernable route connecting each of the elements along Main Street.

### *Social Interaction*

The city should capitalize on opportunities that encourage casual, comfortable social interaction. Having adequate room to exit a car parked at street side and interact with friends that are strolling along Main Street should be provided in the design. Citizens should have seating opportunities along Main Street to sit and enjoy people watching. Ideally, people should be able to sit and share conversation and a cup of coffee at a small table on the sidewalk in front of the coffee shop. These are all examples of casual social interaction that are attainable. Provisions should be made to plan for these

**“It makes Main Street look like it can be so exciting. Make this town a nice place to come to.”**

**~ Azle focus group participant**

situations in all future development plans for both the private and public facilities along Main Street.

### *Corridor Identification*

There is strength in being able to know you are on Main Street by the elements that you see. These elements could include:

- Colored paving, pictorial or historical paving that is unique to Azle or that depicts historic community events (as was done with the etching inside the new Memorial Library).
- The use of gateway elements such as arches, obliques or other architectural elements that could be book ends for the zone could be used to identify the entrance and exit to the Main Street Corridor.
- Enhanced intersection elements such as paving and crosswalks that are distinctively different from the primary travel way by use of texture, color, patterns or special elements.
- Consistent landscape material or repetitive ensembles of plant materials at regular intervals.
- Distinctive decorative utility elements such as sign and utility poles that are of a consistent design and color.

Any of these components can include elements of whimsy or fun to express playfulness or take on a high degree of social sophistication. The choice is yours. The key is to define and implement improvements over the total length of the corridor with a pallet of elements that represent the theme and character established by the community.

Moderation in the implementation of this ‘theming’ should be used to avoid the effect of the design being “overdone” or obnoxious.

### *City Hall Presence*

City Halls are busy and active places that generate destination-orientated traffic every day. It is desirable to include these types of public anchors in successful commercial developments because of this traffic and the diversity of the visitors that come to the facility. City Hall’s presence on or near Main Street would help Azle capitalize on the community’s identity and provide a setting for social gathering, greatly increasing the success of Main Street.

### *Seasonal Flags/Banners*

Banners and flags can be incorporated to announce seasonality and special events. At their best, the structure for these elements is permanently installed as part of the overall theme designed for the corridor. Flexibility is gained by the ability to change the graphic element as desired, which can put a new face on existing elements at regular intervals.

### *Heritage – History and Preservation*

Each community is unique and different, and no formula exists for depicting or representing ones heritage. Sometimes a community’s history is not one that is particularly interesting or one that citizen’s desire to embrace. In these instances there is an opportunity to establish new values or goals that focus on the future. Whether illustrating a rich heritage that exists or defining a new one that needs to begin,



## Section Four



depictions of elements can be incorporated into a community's theme design. The use of murals, sculptures, paving reliefs or pictogram can express the community's identity to visitors and younger generations. The goal is to establish what is most important to Azle's citizens and illustrate it in the elements.

## PLANNING

### *Public Space - Pocket Park(s)*

A master plan for Main Street should identify appropriate public spaces in conjunction with development and redevelopment opportunities. Public spaces should be in the form of plazas, squares, and greens. Pocket parks and greens should be considered for any Downtown residential development.

### *Phased Development*

The Main Street master plan should identify phasing of development in conjunction with infrastructure improvements and changing market conditions.

### *Development Standards*

One of the most critical aspects of successful plan implementation is establishing adjacency predictability for redevelopment. This ensures that property values will increase consistently as redevelopment occurs. A regulatory mechanism consistent with the community vision is essential for this plan.

A comprehensive master plan for Main Street should identify various redevelopment



opportunities and establish distinct character zones, each with its own development goals, character, intensity and scale. Since a high quality public realm is what creates a walkable, mixed use downtown, the changes to regulatory standards that affect the built environment should be mandatory. Voluntary standards, will, in the long-term, undermine the goals of the plan by not requiring adjacent properties within the same zone to take advantage of adjacency predictability which increases all property values. Having a regulatory framework that does not require ALL property owners to meet higher design standards will create an uncertain environment and may fail to attract new investment. Thus, mandatory design standards are an economic development imperative as opposed to an aesthetic requirement.

Nevertheless, Azle should seriously consider implementation of a form-based code or zoning for Downtown. And when it's done,



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the City may wish to arrange it so existing enterprises can stay in business the way they are now. If they're just reinventing themselves, fine—since that adds value and that will help them. However, people shouldn't be put out of business when recoding, since it can be a 15-20 year process.

### *Signage Standards*

A comprehensive set of signage standards should be adopted in conjunction with the development standards that implement the vision for Main Street.

### *Funding Sources*

The successful reinvention of Main Street to support the vision will require investment in critical public infrastructure. A coherent master plan corresponding development standards will provide the needed framework for harnessing quality growth into Downtown as the region continues to grow.

As the city continues to invest in infrastructure and maintenance, they need to be able to better leverage private development along Main Street. A comprehensive set of development standards that implements the vision for Main Street, together with city's infrastructure program, can be the value capture vehicle by which public investment in transportation and other civic infrastructure is leveraged. This increases the development potential of all properties along the corridor, thus increasing property values and tax revenues to the community.

Since retail market studies routinely change every ½ mile, Azle may wish to think of nodes or districts along the Main Street corridor—to accommodate people traveling to Downtown from further away. The suggested Master Plan takes into account some initial node segmentation and identification.



## Section Four



## A VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

### Future Land Use Map Recommendation

The compilation of uses discussed and desired for the Downtown area will likely require significant alterations to the existing zoning categories and to the land use plan that governs future development.

In order to encourage the desired development we recommend the City of Azle take a proactive role and establish the necessary entitlements that will facilitate the desired development mix. This will likely include updates to the City's existing Land Use Plan and Zoning Map. The Land Use Map update could be as simple as modifying the study area south of Stewart Street to Central Business (CB) and changing the AISD land and adjacent parcel to CB. The description of Central Business will likely need to be altered to include a provision for Mixed-Use. The Zoning Map alterations could be similar to the divisions illustrated on the Future Land Use Map included in this report.

In addition to the map revisions there will need to be at least four new Zoning classifications reflecting the recommended mixed-use provisions with the associated focus and allowable uses.

Due to the nature of mixed-use requiring significant flexibility, the typical focus of these type of district regulations is on the form of the building and the common or public spaces rather than just on the use. These are sometimes called Form Based

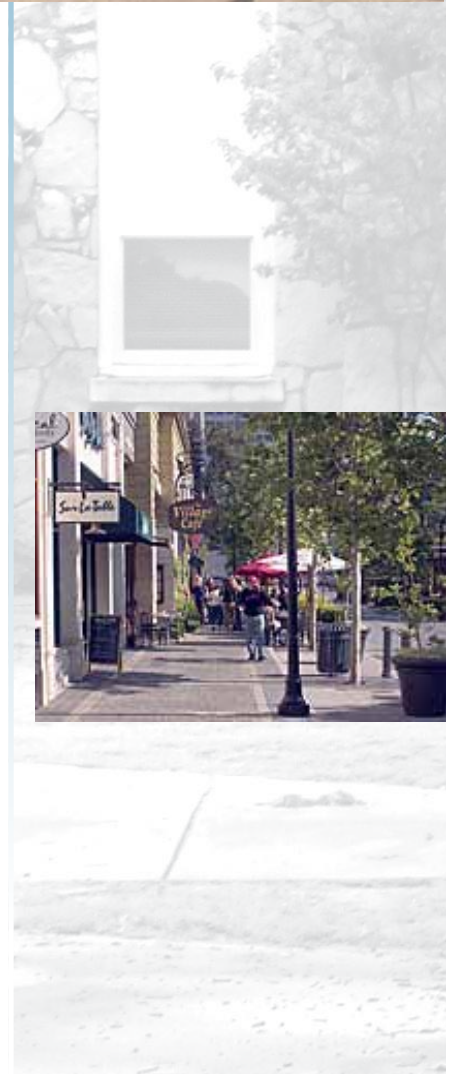


Codes. The following is copied from the Form Base Code Institute:  
<http://www.formbasedcodes.org/definition.html>

Form-based codes are drafted to achieve a community vision based on time-tested forms of urbanism. Ultimately, a Form-based code is a tool: the quality of development outcomes is dependent on the quality and objectives of the community plan that a code implements.

Form-based codes commonly include the following elements:

- Regulating Plan – a plan or map of the regulated area designating the locations where different building form standards apply based on clear community intentions regarding the physical character of the area being code.
- Public Space Standards – Specifications



## Section Four

for the elements within the public realm (e.g., sidewalks, travel lane, on-street parking, street trees, street furniture, etc.).

- Building form Standards – regulations controlling the configurations, features and functions of buildings that define and shape the public realm.
- Administration – a clearly defined application and project review process.
- Definitions – a glossary to ensure the precise use of technical terms.

Form-based codes also sometimes include:

- Architectural Standards – regulations controlling external architectural materials and quality.
- Landscape Standards – regulations controlling landscape design and plant materials on private property as they impact public spaces (e.g. regulations about parking lot screening and shading, maintaining sight lines, insuring unobstructed pedestrian movements, etc).
- Signage Standards – regulations controlling allowable signage sizes materials, illumination and placement.
- Environmental Resource Standards - regulations controlling issues such as storm water drainage and infiltration, development on slope, tree protection, solar access, etc.
- Annotation Text and Illustrations - explaining the intentions of specific

code provisions.

Listed below are the designations along with the recommended allowable uses in each district.

#### *C—Civic*

- Public Library
- City Park
- Museum
- Public Recreation Facility

#### *CH—Church*

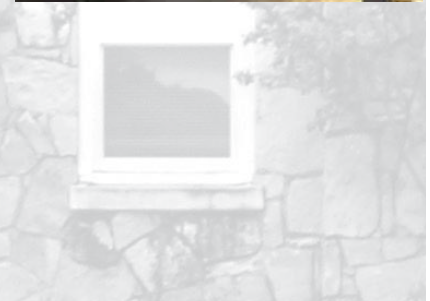
(wondering if this should be included in the MU3 listing of uses and omitted as a separate category)

- Place of Worship and Ministry

#### *I—Industrial*

(wondering if this should be omitted and categorized as MU3 or R to plan for the future development desires)

- Industrial manufacturing



## Section Four



*MU1-- Mixed Use -Municipal Focus*

- Municipal Office
- Community Center
- Municipal Plaza
- General Professional Office
- Other Governmental Office
- Restaurant

*MU2-- Mixed Use -Office Focus*

- General Professional Office
- Medical Office
- Restaurant
- Residential Loft
- Service Retail
- Other Governmental Office
- Live Work Units

*MU3-- Mixed Use - Office /Retail Focus*

- General Retail – ground floor only
- General Professional Office
- Medical Office
- Restaurant
- Residential Loft
- Live Work Units

*MU4-- Mixed Use -Residential Focus*

- Residential Loft
- Town Home
- Live Work Units
- Office– ground floor only
- Retail– ground floor only

*R--Retail*

*General Retail*

*Service Retail*

*Restaurant*

*Fast Food*

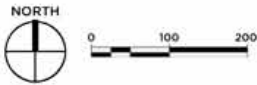
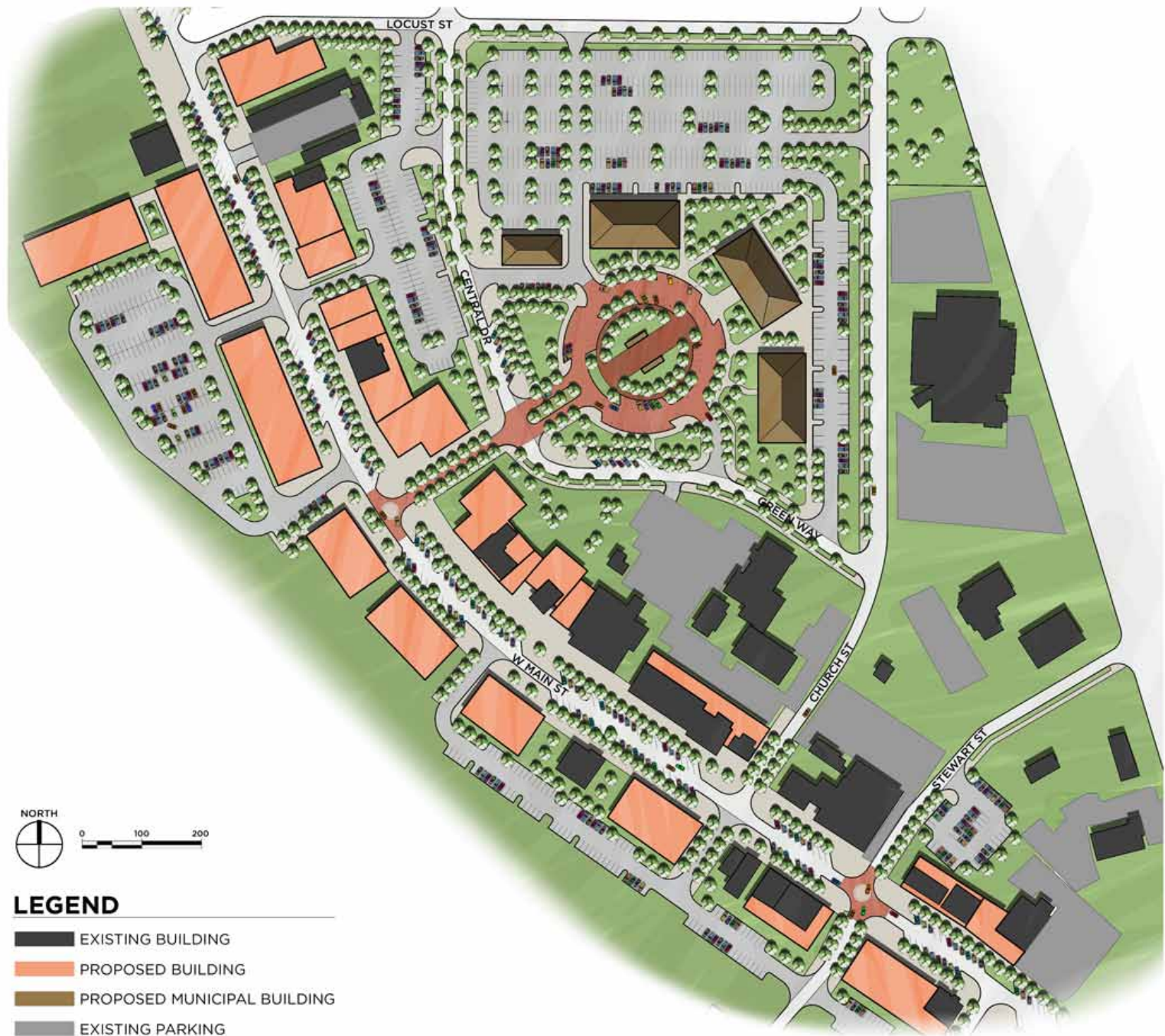
All Mixed Use districts are intended to accommodate and encourage greater density of development utilizing the first floor for commercial use with the second and possible third floor accommodating, office and residential uses.



Section Four

A VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

Concept Plan



LEGEND

- EXISTING BUILDING
- PROPOSED BUILDING
- PROPOSED MUNICIPAL BUILDING
- EXISTING PARKING



## A VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

### Significant Intersections

Few Cities have an opportunity such as Azle. For while your Main Street includes several transitional buildings, the existing alignment and street grid to the east provide Azle with opportunities to enhance intersections along the thoroughfare—especially at Stewart, Church and the entrance to the proposed municipal complex.

Here's where the place making flourishes, especially as Azle brands it's Downtown with pavers or stained concrete, street furniture and native landscaping.

What is urbanism?

“...places that encourage unplanned contact with other people.”

~ Milosav Cekic, Gateway Planning Group



Section Four

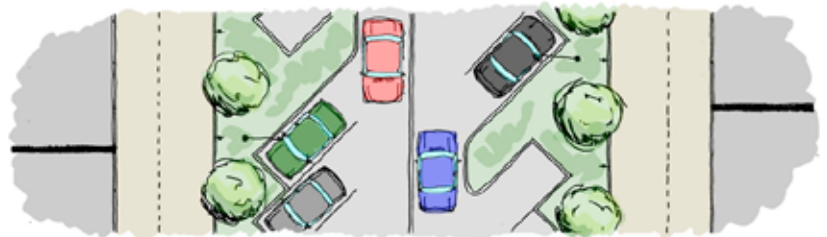
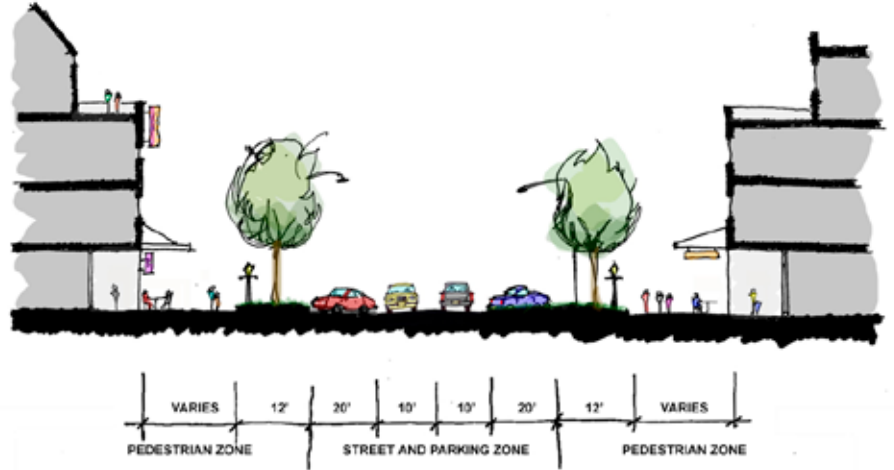
## STREET SCAPE CONCEPTS

- Pedestrian corridor
- Human Scale
- Edge Definition
- Public Spaces Public Realm
- Public Art
- Gathering spaces
- Street Side Parking
- Stoops and porches
- Balconies
- Casual encounters
- Street Trees

### Street Frontage Landscape Requirements:

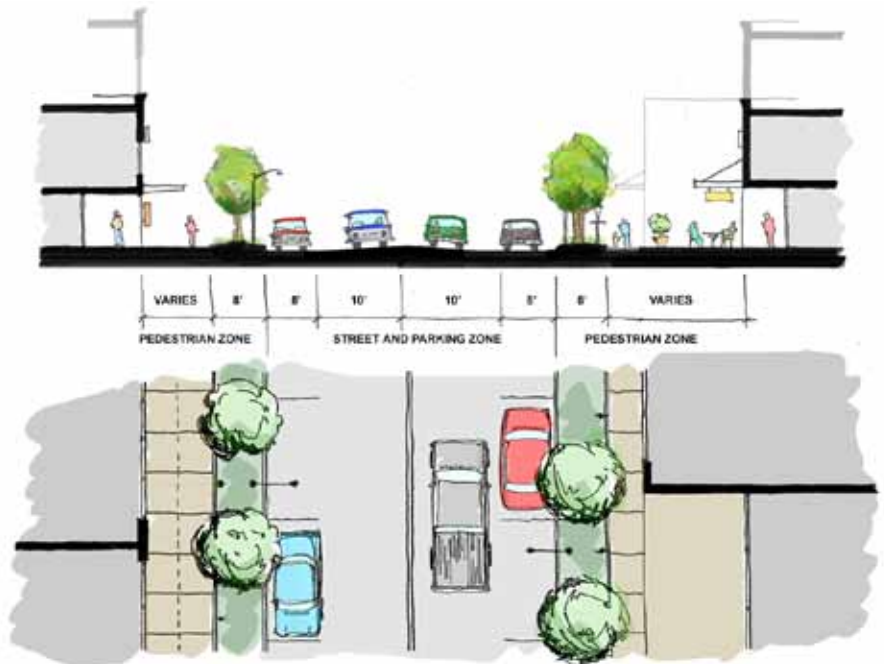
- All Street Frontage will be planted with living plant materials based on the following requirements:
- Plant selections shall be limited to the approved plant list and specific species.
- All Street trees shall be installed in planting areas of at least 160 square feet with a minimal dimension of not less than 6 feet across. These planting areas shall include other living plant materials as selected from the approved plant material list.
- Where this is not practical in street scapes or in other paved court areas, tree plantings may occur by utilizing the criteria established for CU-Structural Soil y in Urban Environments. The minimal acceptable depth of CU- Soil y shall be 36".
- Porous paving systems may be permitted to within 8" of the tree trunks where CU- Soil y is utilized for planting media.

### SECTION A



*Recommended Main Street Design Criteria as defined by the ITE (Institute of Transportation Engineers):*  
Suburban C-3 Commercial Avenue

### SECTION B



*Recommended Main Street Design Criteria as defined by the ITE (Institute of Transportation Engineers):*  
Suburban C-3 Commercial Avenue



## IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary of Short-term Opportunities

The City of Azle has an immediate opportunity to impact business at the south end of Main Street through the addition of street parking. GSBS recommends that Azle purchase one of three vacant lots located near the south end of Main Street, grade, pave and improve it as a public parking lot.

Businesses and property owners are open to residency above or behind enterprises (as is presently allowed in the CBD zoning district)—as well as to permitting existing, detached residential units to add granny-flats, garage apartments or other similar structures, if warranted. What we're seeking is purposeful integration of corridor land use and transportation (rather than a carving of the corridor into separate silos & pieces).

Property and/or business owners prefer not to see the Downtown include:

- Any additional detached single-family residences
- Sexually-oriented businesses
- Junk, salvage or storage-related businesses

Participants agreed that “it would be nice to have some consistency” in the look of Azle’s Downtown area, believing that would further unify the area and help provide continuity. They made it clear that they’d “like to see a nice blend” of architecture—most notably either similar to Azle’s “Trammell Stone” or similar to the architecture shown on the former drug store, in the remnants of the

McDonald’s Store or Stribling Pharmacy.

### Greatest Need

Insufficient storm water drainage facilities create the most destructive force to Downtown Azle.

### SHORT TERM IMPROVEMENTS

- Overhead Power Lines
- Drainage
- Way Finding Signage

#### *Overhead Power Lines*

Location: Various locations parallel and crossing the Main Street Corridor

Objective: Relocate existing overhead power lines to rear of lots adjacent to Main Street corridor

“We have our festivals throughout the year, but to have more businesses that are open every day, that can bring more entertainment.”

~ Azle focus group participant

“It all comes down to the Mom & Pop stores. That’s where you get your small town, Main Street feel.”

~ Azle focus group participant



Constraints: Costs, Limited space for easements/right-of-way, Coordination with Electric/Telephone Companies and Property Owners

Action: Begin coordination with Electric Company to develop potential options for relocation including phasing, cost sharing (if applicable), etc.

### *Drainage*

A couple of key visions for the Main Street corridor that were discussed in the public charrette meetings included improving the pedestrian mobility and aesthetic appearance of the studied corridor. A key component to implementing of these visions will be addressing the effects of the existing drainage conditions on the corridor. Based on the conditions described above and in accordance with the concept master plan developed as part of this study, the following improvement options may serve as a short term approach to addressing the critical drainage conflicts that currently exist along the studied corridor.

### *Way Finding Signage*

Design graphic and determine locations for way finding signage in the downtown area and throughout the City indicating routes to key civic locations such as Main Street, Central, the Memorial Library, the Church's Community Center, and other appropriate destinations. These signs should be unique and consistent throughout the town so that they will be iconic and identifiable.

\* Note: The following improvement options are provided based on a conceptual review of the existing drainage conditions along the

Main Street corridor. Topographic survey for each of the improvement areas was not performed as part of this study and will be a critical action item prior to the design and construction of the improvement options described below.

## **LONG TERM IMPROVEMENTS**

- Drainage & Thoroughfare
- Curb & Gutter Street Section

Some things to keep in mind as Azle weighs the value of street and trail improvements: If there is poor connectivity, then within Downtown there will be—

- Low walkability
- A City of strangers
- Higher congestion
- Higher VMTs
- Lower feasibility of future transit
- Embedded high cost of travel

### *Drainage & Thoroughfare*

As stated in the Short Term Improvement Options – Drainage section, a couple of key visions for the Main Street corridor that were discussed in the public charrette meetings included improving the pedestrian mobility and aesthetic appearance of the studied corridor. A key component to the implementation of these visions will be addressing the effects of the existing drainage conditions on the corridor.





## IMPLEMENTATION

In order to take advantage of the development and redevelopment opportunities available in Downtown Azle, the community should seriously consider conducting a comprehensive Master Plan of Main Street at the building and block level, based on a conservative real estate market analysis. In addition to identifying redevelopment and new development areas, such a Master Plan should address distinct development outcomes and designate corridor character zones.

In addition, Azle staff professionals or the City's planning consultant should integrate streets, parks and civic uses into such a plan. The implementation of such a plan should also coordinate the City's Capital Improvement Program with a new regulatory framework, incorporating development standards to help Azle realize its vision for Main Street.

Moreover, such a framework should be applied on a mandatory basis to provide predictability when it comes to adjacency—yielding a little more investment security

for public and private property owners. Additionally, Azle's implementation of such a plan will require additional sources of funding. Along those lines, special districts, State and regional grants and other funding opportunities should be explored concurrently to and in conjunction with this effort.

It likewise may be wise for the Azle City Council to appoint a Main Street Advisory Task Force to continue gathering property and business owner input; the individuals included in the 3-4 public focus groups indicated an interest in remaining involved; they may make some of the best candidates to consider for continued involvement and direction.

And Azle could also benefit from a regular public Cracker barrel session or State of the Downtown forum—allowing City staff professionals to review development and redevelopment activities within the previous year and to detail proposed implementation plans for the coming 12 months.



**“The streets, the public realm, the division of public and private dictate growth; the market simply says when.”**

**~ Troy Russ, Director of Urban Design, Glatting Jackson/Atlanta**



### Section Four

## SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

As it relates to its Downtown—and more specifically, Main Street—Azle has a prime opportunity to capitalize on momentum created in association with the new Central Park and Memorial Library facilities.

And the City of Azle can continue serving as the primary catalyst for such activities. The leadership displayed by Azle City Council Members and professional staff will determine whether these ideas and suggestions are weighed and pursued (some even forward to completion) or remain on the shelf. In light of the potential sales tax impact of associated growth and expansion—not to mention increased property tax values as a result of new investments—odds are excellent that Azle will be a community of action.

GSBS Architects looks forward to formally presenting these findings to City leaders in the coming weeks—and then working with them to explore the recommendations and suggestions listed above.



“We’re starting to recognize that streets are meant to serve more than just for moving vehicles”

~ Brian T. Welch,  
Fehr & Peers

“You know what? Other towns are doing it . . . .”

“It’s going to take everybody. It can’t just be a couple of businesses.”

~ Azle focus group  
participant



## PUBLIC/PRIVATE INVESTMENT/PARTNERSHIP

The key to long term reinvestment is value capture. As was discussed in the workshops, no single tool will provide the resources necessary. After additional detailed planning, the combination of tools can be matched with infrastructure priorities to catalyze redevelopment. Below are lists of some of the potential tools and grants programs:

### Financial Tools

- Tax Increment Financing – TIF – Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone - TIRZ
- Public Improvement District - PID
- Municipal Management District - MMD
- Chapter 380 and Chapter 381 E.D. Agreement
- G.O. Bonds
- Certificates of Obligation

### Grants

- Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program - STEP
- Congestion Mitigation Air Quality - CMAQ
- Texas Parks & Wildlife – TPW
- Anice Read Fund of Communities Foundation of Texas (Texas Downtown Association)
- Bank of America Historic Tax Credit Fund (National Trust for Historic Preservation)
- National Grantwriters Association
- Grant Writing Workshops - Friends of the Texas Historical Commission
- Challenge America Fast Track Grant program of the National Endowment for the Arts
- State Grants Team - Office of the Governor
- Partnership Grant of the Heritage Tourism Program THC

**“Somebody told me we used to have street dances here.”  
(Jumping Jack Festival)**

**~ Azle focus group participant**

