

Elm Avenue Improvement Plan

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Introduction

The Elm Avenue study area is located in the center of the Brazos River Corridor and includes the blocks along Elm Avenue from Martin Luther King Boulevard to Clifton Street. In several instances adjacent properties outside the planning area are also mentioned in the master plan because of the strong linkage or interface they have with the future development of Elm Avenue.

The goal of this master plan is to set a vision for public improvements, specifically streetscape enhancements that can support development along Elm Avenue. In order to develop a realistic plan for the area it is important to understand the physical context influencing the current image and development pattern of Elm Avenue.

Existing Context

Historically Elm Avenue has been an important place in the development of Waco as a city. Currently, the area is in transition and its identity is shaped by the condition of the properties and buildings along the avenue. A combination of industrial oriented activities, underutilized commercial properties and modest single-family homes are predominant throughout the area. Several businesses remain viable but are scattered along the corridor either because of a strong commitment to their location or to support the area (Figure 1). The Quinn Campus represents a strong desire to rejuvenate



As an extension of downtown, Elm Avenue should be a place that attracts people from adjacent neighborhoods and beyond.



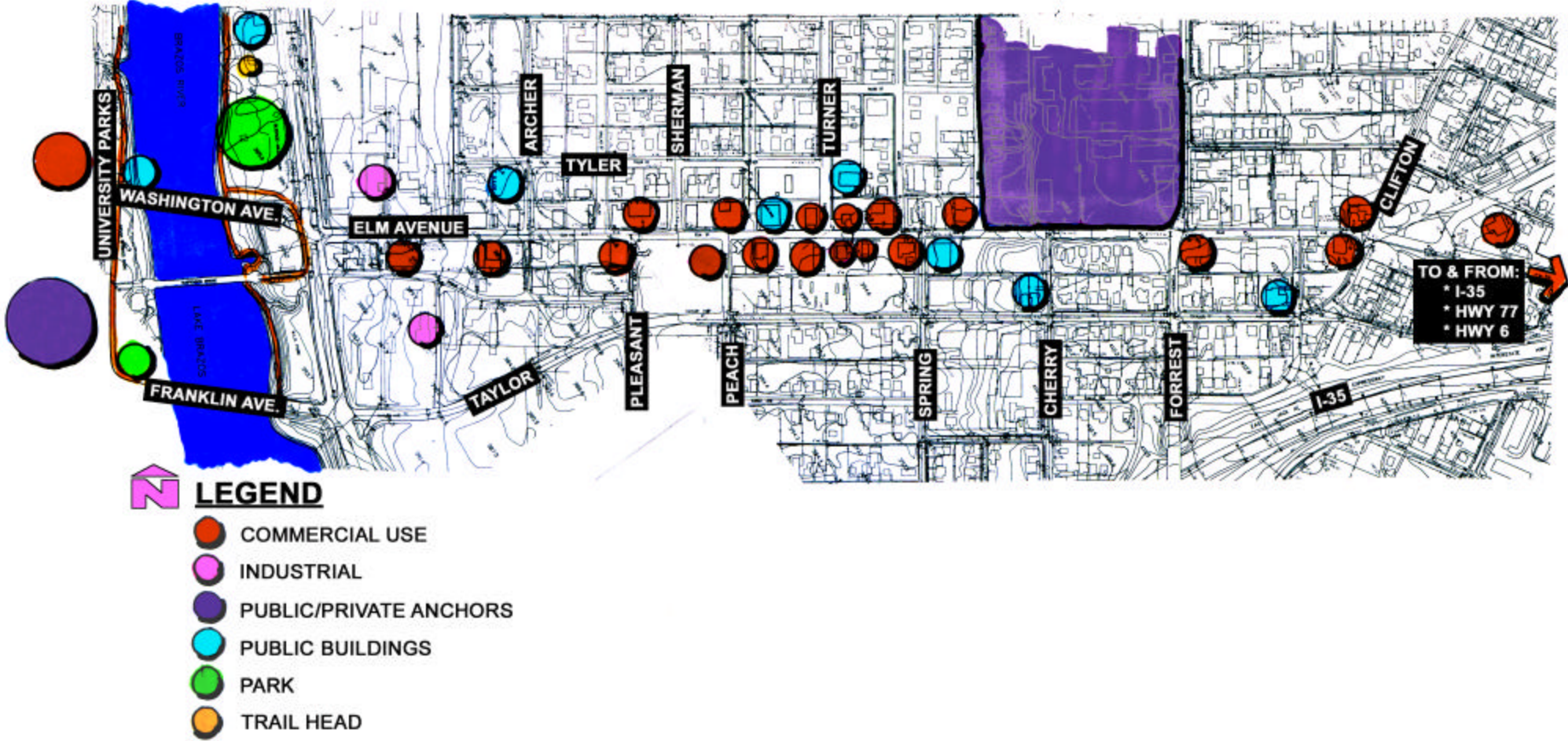


Figure 1: Disconnected uses characterize the development pattern along Elm Avenue.

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the area by creating a mixed-use activity destination through adaptive reuse of the former college campus.

The study area is currently separated from the west side of the Brazos River by the industrial nature of land uses along Martin Luther King Boulevard adjacent to the river corridor. Pedestrian activity can be encouraged in this area by making enhanced connections to and from the Brazos River Corridor. Additionally, this area can function not only as a destination for activity but also as a gateway into downtown



The Suspension Bridge represents a strong historical element that can serve as a linkage between downtown and Elm Avenue.

since Elm Avenue connects directly to the Texas Highway 6 / Interstate 35 interchange and Martin Luther King Boulevard serves as a primary connection between downtown Waco and the Waco Airport.

Plan Guidelines

Because of the location of the Elm Avenue study area within the context of the community, several key guidelines begin to provide a framework for public improvements and future development. These guidelines include the recognition that:

1. Elm Avenue serves a dual role as a destination place in and of itself, and as a gateway into downtown.
2. The recommendations of the Brazos Corridor Development Plan and the implementation efforts taking place are critical to the success of efforts to improve Elm Avenue.
3. Existing viable land use and development must be dealt with in a sensitive and strategic manner. Right-of-way acquisition, public / private redevelopment efforts, property values and affordable housing are tied together and need to be addressed proactively and fairly if implementation is to be successful.
4. Quinn Campus redevelopment efforts will dramatically influence the future of Elm Avenue.
5. Improvements and development in the Elm Avenue study area should not just attract people from other areas of Waco but also support the needs of the residents of

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adjacent neighborhoods. These improvements will need to reflect the quality, type and density values of the community.

6. Elm Avenue must establish its own identity within the context of the community, yet improvements need to complement the goals and improvements made along the Brazos River Corridor.
7. Linkages to the Brazos River Corridor need to be maximized.
8. Daytime and nighttime activity impacts the perception of Elm Avenue as not only a desirable place to be but also a safe place to be.

Future Urban Form

Figure 2 depicts the general urban form and community context envisioned for the Elm Avenue study area. Three distinct sections of the corridor are indicated and set the physical framework for improvement and development efforts along Elm Avenue.

The West-End

This section of the corridor is located between Martin Luther King Boulevard and Archer Street and its character is impacted by existing industrial activities. It is the front door to Elm Avenue from the Brazos River Corridor.

One role of the West End should be inviting people from Brazos River Corridor into the Elm Avenue Corridor. Connections to the Suspension Bridge and the trail need to be convenient and safe to encourage pedestrian use. Additionally, the Washington Avenue and Franklin Avenue bridges are critical not only to automobile circulation but also to pedestrian movements and aesthetic character.

Another role of the West End is as an inviting regional destination. The intersections of Martin Luther King Boulevard with Elm Avenue and Taylor Avenue should be enhanced to assist with pedestrian crossing, wayfinding and gateway elements.



Public enhancements can improve the West-End and assist with pedestrian circulation.

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In general the future land use and development pattern should follow the recommendations of The Brazos Corridor Development Plan and incorporate a series of community and regional activity anchors and destinations. The historic depot block bounded by Martin Luther King Boulevard, Taylor Avenue and Bridge Street lends itself to potential mixed-use development including residential development in town home or loft formats as part of a larger development project.



In the future, land use along this section of Elm Avenue can include a mix of the viable commercial uses that exist today

and commercial uses that support the development of future activity nodes. These new uses would likely be restaurant and entertainment oriented to attract visitors from Brazos River Corridor to Elm Avenue and to retain people attending events at new activity venues in the study area.



Existing



Proposed

Through design and development guidelines new development in the West-End can reflect the desired character of Elm Avenue

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“Main Street”

The heart of the Elm Avenue study area is best defined by the term “main street”. This section of the corridor contains a variety of one and two story commercial buildings built at an urban density. Many of these buildings are vacant but several are home to successful small businesses, institutions and public activities.



Many structures in the “Main Street” section can be renovated for mixed-use development.

These successful businesses are scattered along the “Main Street” section of Elm Avenue from Archer Street to Cherry Street. Vacant and underutilized buildings and properties separate these businesses physically. Additionally, some rehabilitation and redevelopment efforts have been made along this portion of Elm Avenue. The combination of the

public library and County office buildings between Spring and Cherry Streets has created a public use activity anchor at the east end of this section of Elm Avenue. This anchor should remain and be strengthened through the addition and expansion of public uses in the future.



Future development should reflect the character and scale of the existing buildings.

Unfortunately, new development has typically been done in an opportunistic manner following a suburban land development pattern. This approach has served to create breaks in the “main street” character. In the future, development should be accomplished in a manner that is more urban in character reflecting the building scale and location of the existing storefronts.

The structures along Elm Avenue should incorporate a mixture of uses, with commercial shops and retail activity that support the needs of the adjacent neighborhood location on the ground

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floors of buildings. Office and residential use would be located on upper floors of the structures.



Renovated structures should contain a variety of uses with the most active use being on the ground floor.

Behind the structures along Elm Avenue there is an abundance of vacant land and underutilized off street parking area. These areas can become places for town home residential development and district parking in the future. An effective combination of new housing and redesigned parking areas can help attract new and retain existing residents. As a result, adjacent neighborhoods become more stable; established single family areas are buffered from commercial impacts; and supplemental parking is provided to avoid the need for on-site surface parking. The changes will strengthen

market trade area thus supporting appropriate commercial development for the area.



Town homes can be an effective use of vacant property as a transition between commercial uses on Elm Avenue and adjacent neighborhoods.

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The East -End

From Cherry Street to Clifton Street, the East-End is anchored by the Quinn Campus. This redevelopment project can bring a renewed energy to the area by providing employment and education opportunities to citizens in the Elm Avenue area and greater Waco.

The goal in this segment of the corridor is to strengthen the existing neighborhoods. Currently, the East-End is primarily residential in character and should remain that way. Some commercial activity is located at the intersections of Elm Avenue with Forrest Street, and Elm Avenue with Clifton Street.

Such commercial activity should be limited in size and scale in order to minimize impacts on the surrounding residential area. Also, too great an expansion of commercial activity at these locations may weaken the commercial development efforts in the “Main Street” portion of the corridor. Infill housing on vacant parcels and housing rehabilitation efforts should help to improve the residential neighborhoods.



Infill housing in the East-End should reflect the character of existing residential development.

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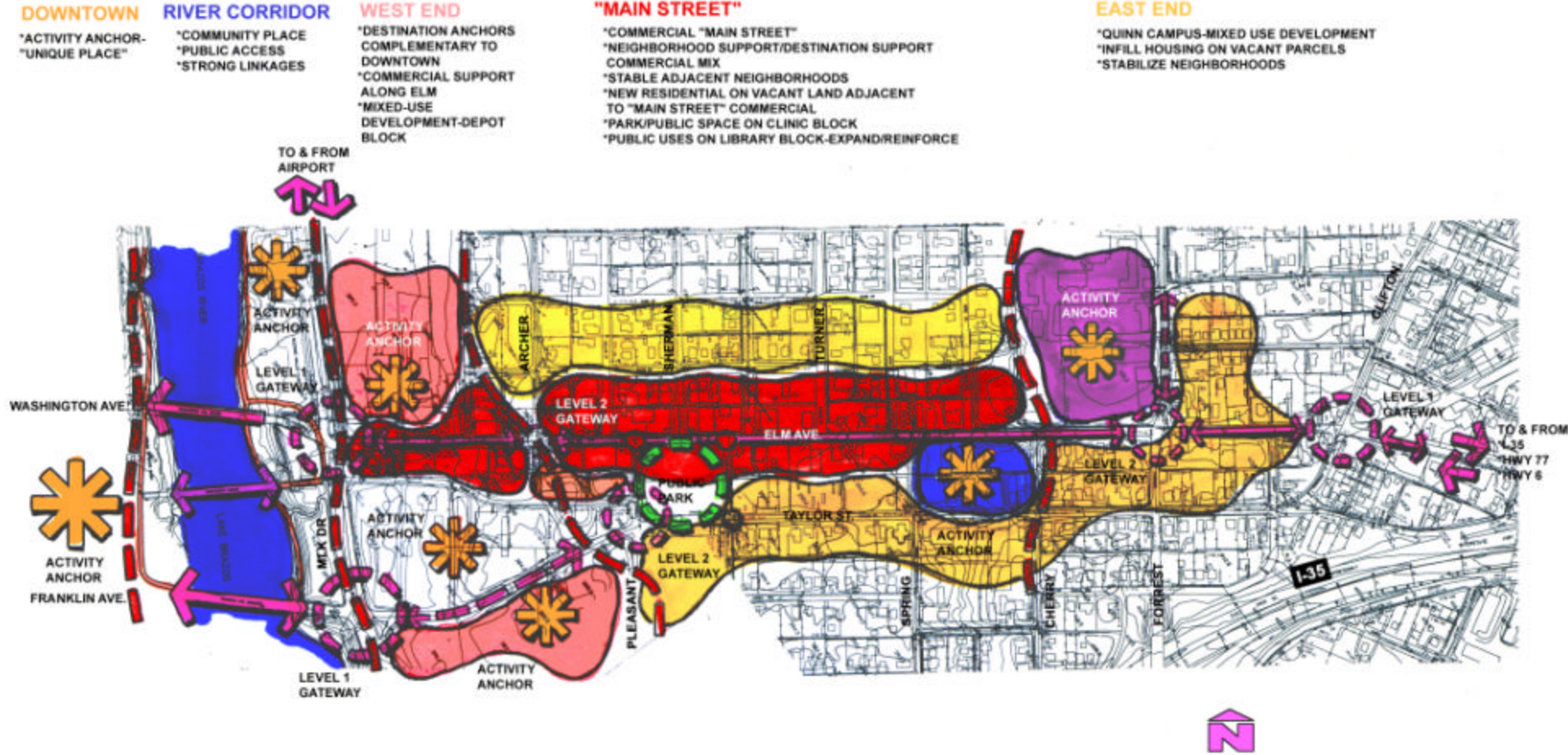


Figure 2: Future Urban Form

Improvement Recommendations

The future urban form sets the framework for considering private development and public improvements. This section of the plan focuses on the improvements that can be made by the public sector in support of community commitment and private investment to the Elm Avenue Corridor. These recommendations are a framework that is important for defining the character and identity of Elm Avenue.

Several key urban design elements and concepts are addressed to assist in promoting the area as a gateway to Brazos River Corridor and as a destination in and of itself.

General Recommendations

The recommendations below are meant to address the general character of public improvements along Elm Avenue and approximately a half to full block length of the cross streets that intersect with Elm Avenue.

1. Retain on-street parking along the entire length of the corridor.
2. Retain the current traffic lane configuration along the entire corridor.
3. Replace the existing street and pedestrian lighting with the same light furnishings as on the West Side of the Brazos River Corridor or select a lighting standard that will reflect the unique built environment of the area.
4. Future streetscape furnishings should be similar to those on the West Side of the Brazos River Corridor. These furnishings would be applied in the West-End and Main Street sections of Elm Avenue. The East-End would not have furnishings beyond the streetlights and traffic signals.
5. Reconstruct street pavement, curbs, gutters and sidewalks to meet existing improvement standards. Retain limestone curbs as feasible. Utilize other materials (brick, limestone, color concrete, etc.) as streetscape accents in crosswalks, ADA ramps, sidewalks, and tree planters. These accents should complement materials used on Austin Avenue but should not replicate those features.
6. Street trees should be of large caliper (6 to 8 inches) limited to key locations – anchoring corners of blocks, at breaks in buildings, gateways, etc. These trees should be planted in tree wells that are sized appropriately (approximately 500 cubic feet) to accommodate the full growth of the tree and plantings that can add seasonal color to the area. The tree wells should be irrigated.
7. Stylized permanent metal banners should be placed on the light fixtures. These banner elements should reflect a unique quality for Elm Avenue. Each could be an individual piece of public art or they all could be the same pattern. Supplemental seasonal or special event fabric banners should be placed on light fixtures in the East-End and “Main Street” portions of Elm Avenue up to Quinn Campus at Forrest / Garrison Street.

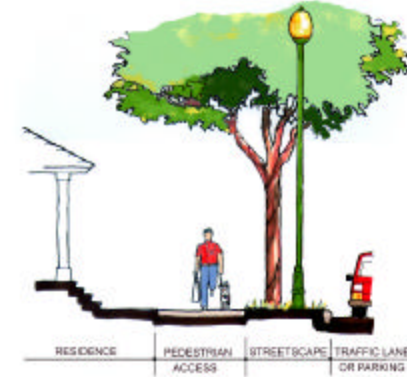
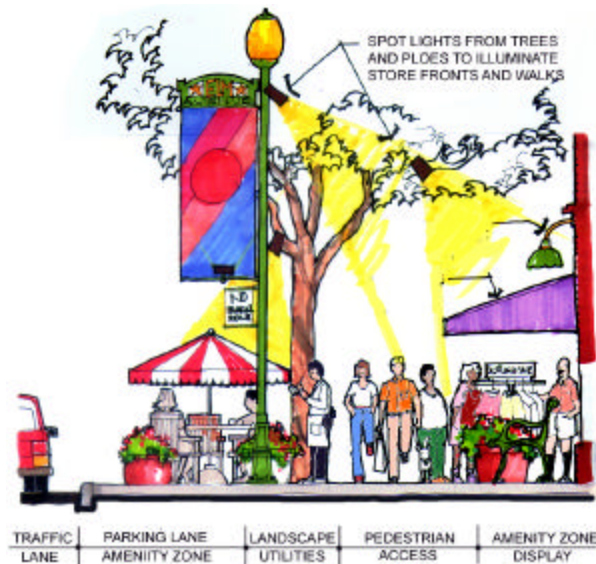
8. Above ground utilities should be dealt with on a block by block basis. The removal of above ground utilities to new locations or underground will need to be determined by adjacent redevelopment project needs and streetscape application requirements. If the utilities are to be moved they should go in alleys or other rights-of-way / easements running parallel to Elm Avenue.
9. Gateway and wayfinding features should be limited to key intersections along the corridor.
10. Redevelopment and rehabilitation efforts should occur using design and development guidelines that complement the character of the streetscape improvements and reflect the desired character and history of the Elm Avenue area.
11. When the time is right, consider the development of a public park or community gathering place located along Elm Avenue. Currently, the block between Pleasant and Peach Streets could incorporate such a place. This open space could have room for neighborhood block parties, small art fairs or food festivals, historic / interpretive elements unique to Elm Avenue, public art, interactive play equipment for neighborhood children, etc. This is a place for the immediate community to use.
12. Taylor Avenue from Martin Luther King Boulevard to the Pleasant Street should be enhanced to a standard equivalent to that of Elm Avenue. This linkage to Elm Avenue is critical given the current traffic pattern crossing the Brazos River and the proposed urban form in the area.

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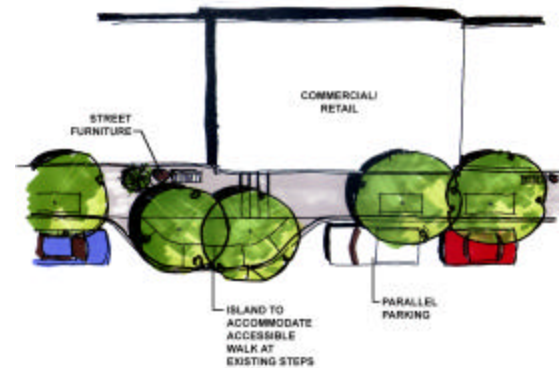
Streetscape Principles

Streetscape improvements generally occur within road rights-of-way. The intent of the streetscape is to enhance the visual character of an area in a manner that does not interfere with its functional aspects. Improvements should:

- Assist in defining the character of the area.
- Serve as a transition from the roadway to private development.
- Accommodate safe and convenient pedestrian movement.
- Retain maximum visibility from the street to the storefront.
- Allow for businesses to extend their business beyond the storefront to increase activity along the street.



The residential character of the East-End requires a streetscape treatment that is less intensive than the remainder of Elm Avenue.



Typical streetscape application in commercial areas of Elm

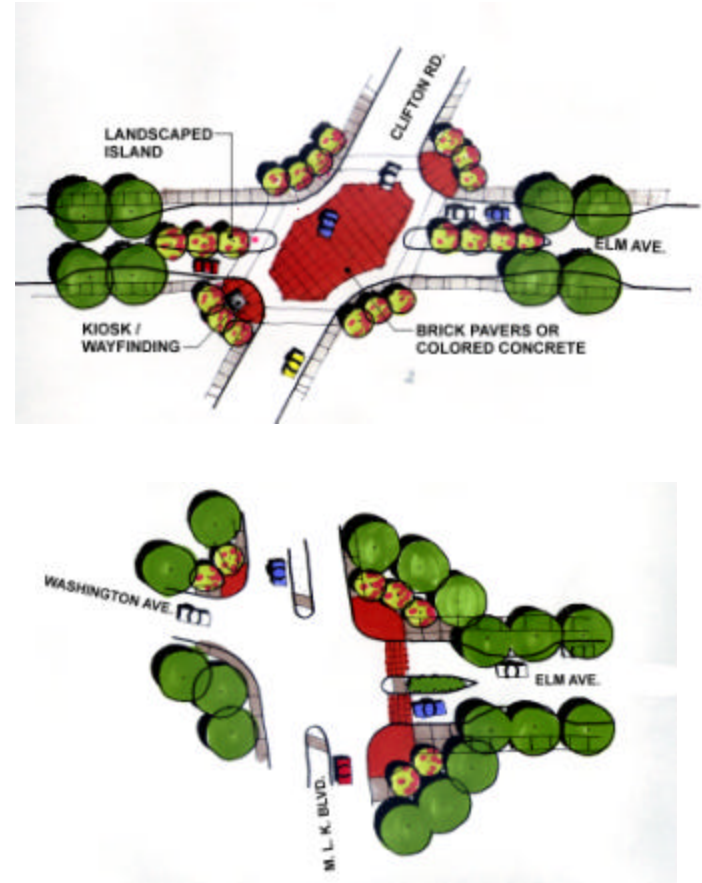
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Gateways

Gateway features or monuments contribute to a sense of place, providing visual cues that announce the arrival into an area. These visual cues help to inform visitors that the Elm Avenue Corridor is a distinct district and also to assist people coming into downtown Waco with a sense of arrival. Gateway markers are intended to provide a substantial landmark in the area and reinforce the area's identity.

Two types of gateways are identified for the Elm Avenue corridor. Level 1 gateways incorporated regional wayfinding elements. They not only announce the arrival to Elm Avenue but also recognize the regional context of that location by identifying the direction of the convention center, the airport, the Brazos River Corridor, and other regional destinations. Recommended Level 1 gateway locations include:

- Elm Avenue at Martin Luther King Boulevard
- Taylor Avenue at Martin Luther King Boulevard
- Elm Avenue at Clifton Street

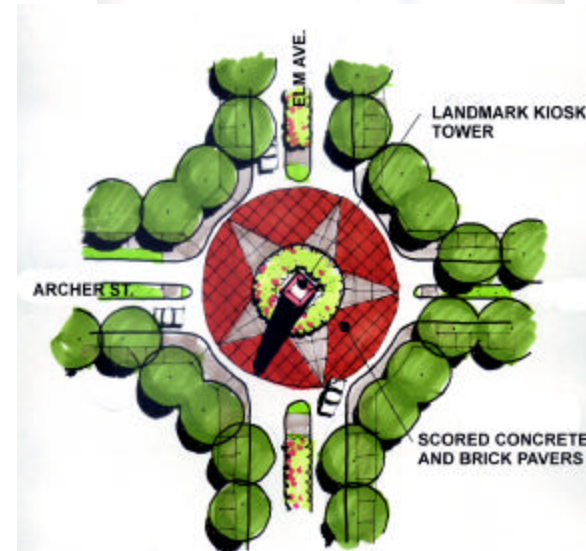
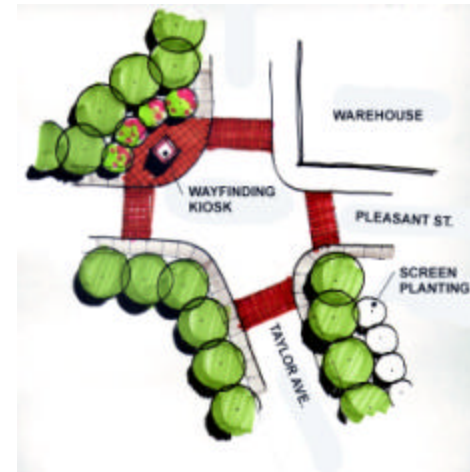
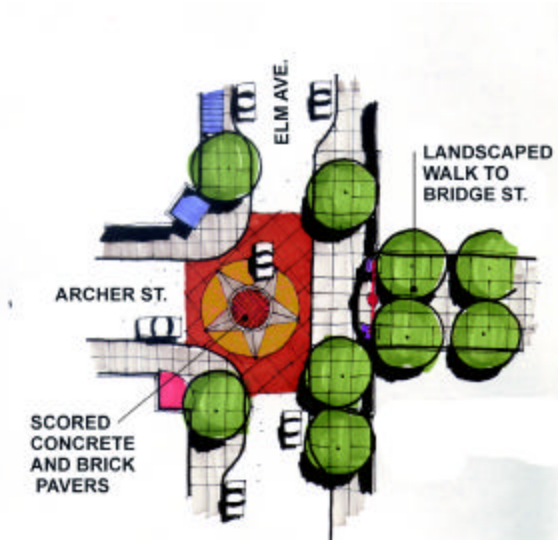


Conceptual Level 1 Gateway applications.

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Level 2 gateways are focused upon the Elm Avenue itself. They reinforce the identity of Elm Avenue and define the core area along Elm Avenue. Level 2 gateway locations include:

- Elm Avenue at Archer Street
- Bridge Street, Pleasant Street, Taylor Avenue intersection
- The Elm Avenue, Forrest Street, Garrison Street intersection



Conceptual Level 2 Gateway applications.

Urban Development Guidelines

Urban development and design guidelines should be employed to ensure that the resulting physical environment reflects the quality and character that is desired. Such guidelines should address the following:

- Building setbacks that are close to the street help to define the urban location. Residential setbacks should meet existing building lines when infill is proposed. New residential and all commercial development should reflect a minimal setback recognizing the urban nature of the area.
- Building façade treatments such as awnings, architectural elements and creative (yet acceptable) sign and window displays can provide variety and reflect area qualities.
- Unique signage that fits within the architectural character of the area can improve the feeling of being in a distinct district.
- Outdoor seating and display areas in front of cafes, coffee shops and retail stores provide both visual interest and opportunities for pedestrians and shoppers to “people watch”. This adds to the liveliness of the area and helps to create an active and safer environment.
- Adequate parking can be provided through on-street parking and district surface parking areas behind buildings. On-street parking slows traffic and creates a safer feeling space for the pedestrian between the building and the street.
- Weather protection should be provided for patrons at entries to buildings. Awnings and canopies should be made of materials and colors that are consistent with the architectural character of the building and the area.
- Maintain existing housing stock and restore where needed. New housing should utilize similar architectural styling and an urban scale massing to reinforce the character and identity of the area.
- Adequately screen on-site parking areas and provide pedestrian connections to sidewalks and building entries.
- Street trees along enhanced roadways and important connections should be similar to street tree types used along Austin Avenue and University Park Drive. The use of this and other similar elements along Elm Avenue reinforces the connection between both sides of the Brazos River Corridor.