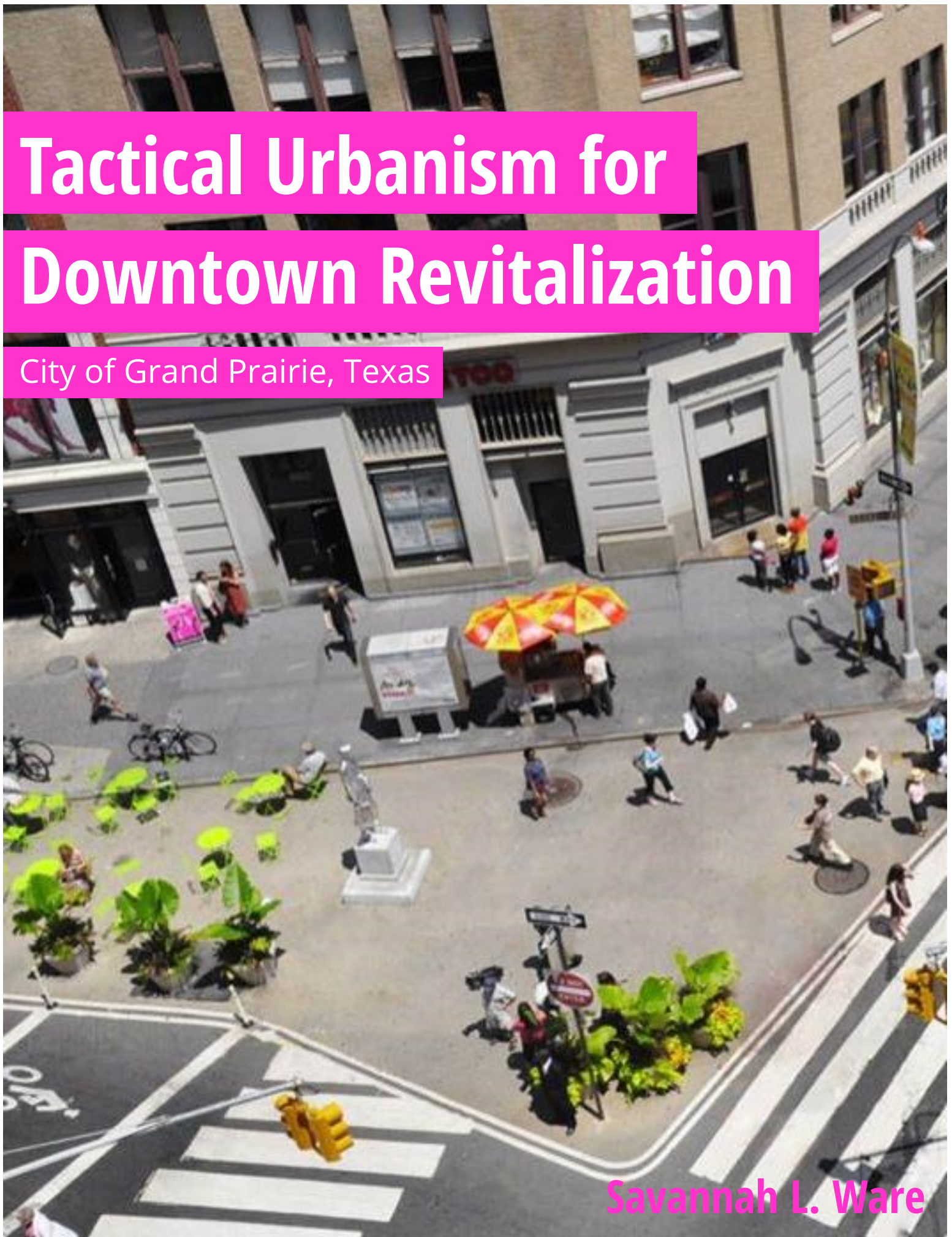


Tactical Urbanism for Downtown Revitalization

City of Grand Prairie, Texas



Savannah L. Ware

TACTICAL URBANISM FOR DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

CITY OF GRAND PRAIRIE, TEXAS

by

SAVANNAH L. WARE

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Forward

I've known for a while that I wanted Downtown Grand Prairie to be the subject of my professional report. I've always been interested in downtown revitalization—there's something incredibly exciting about the opportunities and challenges that downtowns present. I have worked for the City of Grand Prairie for over five years. City Hall and City offices are located downtown, which means that I've spent a considerable chunk of my life in downtown Grand Prairie.

It's difficult to bridge the gap between planning theory and practice. While I think this is something planners struggle with throughout their career, the gap between theory and practice is most apparent when planners enter the real world of planning after graduation. I've worked full time as a planner while attending graduate school—sometimes it seems like I struggle with this gap every day. I have gone back and forth between complete faith in planning and the feeling that planning is obsolete. I've questioned the ability of conventional planning to achieve meaningful results in the real world. When thinking through issues at work I'd often begin with what I'd learned, discussed, and read at school. Inevitably, I'd follow this with a “but this is the real world so” statement.

During the times I had complete faith in conventional planning, I often thought about downtown Grand Prairie's potential. I couldn't believe that the City was investing all of this time and money into downtown without a downtown master plan—the blasphemy of it! Any planner knows that downtown needs a plan! How could City leaders not see this?

Over the past year or two, I've come to recognize the naiveté and arrogance in this line of thinking (I do not know more than City leaders—taking a few planning classes doesn't come close to their knowledge and experience). This is the same naiveté and arrogance that the planning profession has struggled with and continues to struggle with. Only it's much easier to recognize in Robert Moses and the urban renewal policies of the 1960s than your own thoughts.

Although I didn't completely give up on conventional planning, the mental list I kept of planning prerequisites or things that had to go absolutely perfectly for planning to work seemed to grow. At the same time, the number of instances where conventional planning could work in the real world seemed to shrink. Around this time I started reading about tactical urbanism. I loved its creativity and flexibility. Most of all, I loved that tactical urbanism got real world results.

My favorite book is *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card. If you haven't read it, I suggest that you do. In fact, if you only have enough time to read this professional report or *Ender's Game*, put this down and pick up the book. I promise I won't be offended. Whenever I have an "ah-ha" moment, I think about when Ender leads his squadron into mock battle. Two corridors lead to a zero-gravity battle room. When the doors open, members of each team launch themselves into the battle room. Without exception, they enter the battle room oriented as they were in the corridor. Ender defies convention when he instructs his team to enter the chamber feet first giving the opposing team a much smaller target. Ender's instruction totally reorients the game—up is no longer up.

I think tactical urbanism is a lot like entering the battle chamber feet first. It upsets the conventional order of things and questions assumptions that are ingrained in planning practice. I have come to see tactical urbanism as a way to bridge the gap between planning theory and practice. It has helped me realize that I don't need to dismiss everything I've learned in school, I just need to reorient my perspective so that up is no longer up.

Abstract

TACTICAL URBANISM FOR DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

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Savannah L. Ware, MS

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2017

Efforts to revitalize downtowns continue to gain momentum as planners, developers, and city leaders focus on creating vibrant downtowns to meet the demand for walkable urbanism. Some cities find they lack the resources to implement downtown area plans. Tactical urbanism is an alternative approach to city-building that could be used in these instances. This professional report will explore downtown revitalization and tactical urbanism using the City of Grand Prairie, Texas as a case study. This report will create a plan using tactical urbanism to revitalize downtown Grand Prairie.

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01

Introduction

Downtown Grand Prairie

Like many cities, Grand Prairie is working to revitalize its downtown. Over the past ten to fifteen years, the City of Grand Prairie has made significant investments in the downtown area. In 2005, the City purchased, restored, and reopened a historic theater as a multi-use performing arts center (City of Grand Prairie 2016a). In 2009 The City of Grand Prairie constructed Market Square, a \$1.2 million, half-acre park that houses a weekly Farmers Market (City of Grand Prairie 2016a). The Main Street Façade program and other streetscape enhancements have improved downtown aesthetics. Annual special events like Main Street Fest, Crawfish Boil, and Hatch Chili Fest draw people downtown.

The City's investments have achieved individual success. The Grand Prairie Farmers Market was voted the number one farmers market in Texas for the third year in a row in a contest by American Farmland Trusts (City of Grand Prairie 2017b). The Main Street Façade Program is now in its third phase (City of Grand Prairie 2017c). Main Street Fest attendance reached a record high in 2016 (City of Grand Prairie 2017d).

These investments are important first steps in revitalizing downtown Grand Prairie. Farmers markets are recognized as a successful downtown revitalization tool and can function as economic anchors and activity generators for downtowns (Gratz and Mintz 1998). Façade programs can improve a downtown's image, which is an important step in revitalizing downtowns with weak market demand (Walker 2009). Programming and events like Main Street Fest are essential to attracting people downtown. However, Grand Prairie's investments are not part of a coordinated strategy. Each investment is planned,

implemented, and evaluated in isolation. Consequently, there is little sense of how each project impacts downtown as a whole or contributes to downtown revitalization.

Downtown master plans can bring structure and focus to various downtown activities and initiatives. While they are not the “sole panacea” for revitalization, downtown plans are instrumental in the revitalization process (Walker 2009, 7; Robertson 2001).

Downtowns are the synergy of its parts; downtown plans connect parts into a complex whole (Gratz and Mintz 1998).

What's Next?

The City of Grand Prairie has taken the initial steps towards revitalizing downtown but doesn't have a framework in place to achieve revitalization success. A downtown master plan would provide the framework that is needed to relate individual projects and coordinate actions. However, since the City doesn't have a comprehensive planning division (the City's Planning Department focuses on current planning), it is unlikely that a downtown area plan would be created in-house. Additionally, it does not appear that City Council interest in and support for downtown revitalization is at the level needed to hire a consultant to prepare an area plan.

These challenges are not unique to the City of Grand Prairie. Many cities seeking to revitalize urban areas find that they lack the resources, power, and control to implement formal master plans (Bishop and Williams 2012). Some pursue revitalization without a plan. Other cities “are beginning to experiment with looser planning visions and design frameworks, linked to phased packages of smaller, often temporary initiatives, designed to

unlock the potential of sites now, rather than in 10 years' time" (Bishop and Williams 2012, 3).

Report Overview

The approach I propose for downtown Grand Prairie more closely resembles the looser planning vision described by Bishop and Williams (2012) than a formal master plan. I explore how tactical urbanism can be used to revitalize downtown. Tactical urbanism, an alternative approach to improving cities, uses short-term actions to achieve long-term change (Lydon and Garcia 2015). Unlike the conventional planning process which requires money and political support up front, tactical urbanism is a relatively low-cost approach that has the ability to build support as it is implemented (Lydon and Garcia 2015).

My goal is to combine revitalization best practices and elements found in traditional downtown plans with tactical urbanism to create a revitalization plan for downtown Grand Prairie. The plan presents a concept vision for downtown and contains three phases. In the first phase, the City initiates tactical urbanism demonstration projects to activate downtown and engage stakeholders. The demonstration projects adapt several of Lydon and Garcia's (2015) tactics to downtown Grand Prairie and use materials recommendations and cost estimates from the Tactical Urbanist's Guide to Materials and Design (The Street Plans Collaborative 2016). In the second phase, the City partners with downtown stakeholders to hold a downtown pop-up event. This event is modeled after downtown Corsicana's Historic Spaces and Places pop-up event (APD 2017; Popken 2017). In the third phase, the City creates an activation overlay that allows downtown stakeholders to initiate

tactical urbanism projects of their own. The activation overlay is similar to Congress for the New Urbanism's Pink Zone (Dittmar and Falk 2016). The Pink Zone "identifies a specific area where new protocols are pre-negotiated and experiments are conducted, all with the goal of removing impediments to economic development and community-building" (Dittmar and Falk 2016, 1). In the first two phases, the City of Grand Prairie introduces tactical urbanism as a tool; in the third phase, the City makes this tool available to the public.

Unique Contribution

This plan combines time-tested revitalization practices with tactical urbanism to create an approach that is innovative and flexible. It maximizes opportunities for success by using interventions that are low-risk and high-reward (Lydon and Garcia 2015). These interventions are used to engage stakeholders and test out ideas (Lydon and Garcia 2015). Tactical urbanism complements the conventional planning process and can be used in a number of ways. This approach can be used by cities that lack the resources to hire a consultant to create an area plan or by cities that need help implementing an existing plan (Lydon and Garcia 2015; Morley 2015). The approach is scalable and can be adapted to fit a city's specific needs (Lydon and Garcia 2015).

Limitations

Civic engagement is an important part of the planning process. Community members can provide valuable insight into an area and help see projects through to implementation (Faga 2009). Due to time constraints and limited resources, public

engagement will not be conducted as a part of this professional report. However, one of the main goals of the tactical urbanism interventions suggested in the final chapter of the report is to engage stakeholders in a conversation about the future of downtown.

Structure of the Report

In Chapter 2 I review principles and best practices of downtown revitalization. Next I provide a background on tactical urbanism, discuss the advantages of using this approach, and identify examples of how cities have used tactical urbanism. In Chapter 3 I explain the methods I used to compile a background portrait of downtown Grand Prairie. I served on the Downtown Task Force, reviewed downtown related plans and documents, and used observations from the field and my time as an employee of Grand Prairie to compile background information. I present the findings in Chapter 4 and discuss the issues and opportunities in downtown Grand Prairie. In Chapter 5 I present a strategic plan for downtown Grand Prairie. This chapter is intended to be able to be read as a stand-alone document and serve as an implementation guide for the Downtown Task Force.

02

Literature Review

Introduction

Frieden and Sagalyn describe downtown revitalization as “one of the longest campaigns of local governments” (1997, xi). Downtowns steadily declined after peaking in the 1920s (Robertson 1995). Efforts to revitalize downtowns began in the 1950s after decentralization shifted downtown functions to the suburbs (Robertson 1995). The “thinning out” of downtown functions along with the urban renewal policies of the 1950s and 1960s created downtowns that were drastically different from the downtowns that existed decades earlier (Robertson 1995, 430).

Robertson (1995) presents the following dilemma: on the one hand, civic and business leaders see downtown as an important part of the overall city and are committed to revitalizing downtowns. On the other hand, downtowns are still perceived as inconvenient and obsolete, despite decades of redevelopment efforts (Robertson 1995). Robertson wrote this over twenty years ago. Since then, downtowns have experienced what has been described as an “amazing renaissance” or “rapid comeback” (Leinberger 2005, 1-3). Efforts to revitalize downtowns continue to gain momentum as planners, developers, and city leaders focus on creating vibrant downtowns.

Downtown Revitalization Strategies

Cities have used a variety of strategies and approaches to revitalize their downtowns. In the article “Downtown Redevelopment Strategies in the United States: An End-of-the-Century Assessment,” Robertson analyzes seven commonly used revitalization strategies (1995). The seven strategies are: pedestrianization, indoor shopping centers,

historic preservation, waterfront development, office development, special activity generators, and transportation enhancements (Robertson 1995). Robertson (1995) notes that these land use and urban design strategies are used together and are also integrated with financial and promotional strategies.

According to Robertson, downtown's greatest asset is that it offers an alternative to the "generic suburban environment" (Robertson 1999, 282). Leinberger echoes this idea stating that "the appeal of traditional downtowns—and the defining characteristic that sets those that are successful apart from their suburban competitors—is largely based on what can be summarized as walkable urbanism" (2005, 1). Achieving walkable urbanism is the key to reviving downtown (Leinberger 2005). Part of achieving walkable urbanism means ensuring that people have an interesting and enjoyable streetscape (Leinberger 2005). A number of revitalization strategies seek to capitalize on these unique qualities and reinforce a downtown's distinct sense of place.

Pedestrianization strategies are used to make downtowns more pedestrian-friendly. These strategies include things like widening sidewalks, improving safety, and providing pedestrian amenities (Robertson 1995, 1999). The most important benefit of pedestrianization is a more attractive image of downtown for potential users (Robertson 1995). Creating an appealing, pedestrian-oriented environment entices people to walk around and visit other restaurants and shops. Downtowns are gauged by the volume of pedestrian activity; downtowns with pedestrians look vibrant and successful while downtowns without pedestrians look lifeless (Robertson 1995).

Historic preservation capitalizes on downtown's supply of architecturally interesting, often underutilized, old buildings (Robertson 1995). The festival marketplace and special historic district are two historic preservation projects common in larger cities (Robertson 1995). The Main Street approach is a historic preservation tool that is more common in smaller cities (Robertson 1995). The Main Street approach has four points: organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring (Loescher 2009). The approach views historic buildings as an asset that is critical to a downtown's authenticity and sense of place (Lawniczak 2009; Steele 2009).

While strategies like pedestrianization and historic preservation help to create a pedestrian-oriented downtown with a strong sense of place, they do not guarantee that people will choose to walk. In his *General Theory of Walkability*, Speck (2012) explains that in order for someone to choose to walk, the walk must satisfy four conditions. A walk must be useful, safe, comfortable, and interesting (Speck 2012). Strategies like pedestrianization and historic preservation can make a walk safe, comfortable, and interesting but they do not necessarily make a walk useful.

A walk is useful when "most aspects of daily life are located close at hand and organized in a way that walking serves them well" (Speck 2012, 11). Leinberger describes this component of walkable urbanism as achieving a mix of pedestrian-scaled uses so that a downtown visitor can find enough to do for 4-6 hours and that residents' daily needs can comfortably be met (2005, 2). Fortunately, another inherent asset of downtowns is that they possess a wide range of functions within a compact area (Robertson 1999), making

downtowns well suited to create a useful walk. Some cities work to expand existing downtown functions or attract new ones (Robertson 1999). Housing downtown and in adjacent neighborhoods help create the “critical mass” necessary to support downtown retail, services and restaurants and increases activity levels on evenings and weekends (Robertson 1999).

Urban Husbandry

Faulk (2006) points out that a lot of the literature on downtown revitalization is descriptive, meaning that it describes successful policies and projects. These policies and projects are then replicated in other cities without being adapted to the local context (Faulk 2006; Gratz and Mintz 1998). Sometimes the policy or project isn’t successful or it creates an inauthentic downtown without a strong sense of place (Faulk 2006; Gratz and Mintz 1998). The conventional revitalization approach, or what Gratz and Mintz call “Project Planning,” rebuilds downtowns (Gratz and Mintz 1998, 2). Downtowns that have been rebuilt are essentially a “collection of expensive, big activity places—tourist attractions—connected to each other and the suburbs by a massive auto-based network” (Gratz and Mintz 1998, 2). Project Plans often rely on “magic bullets” such as festival marketplaces, aquariums, stadiums, and convention centers and end up replacing the complex downtown urban fabric (Gratz and Mintz 1998, 3). These types of downtowns are inauthentic and lack the vibrancy and complexity that make downtowns distinctive (Gratz and Mintz 1998).

Gratz and Mintz advocate what they describe as Urban Husbandry (1998). This approach focuses on renewing the urban fabric, which is accomplished by incremental changes and creative problem-solving (Gratz and Mintz 1998). Practitioners of Urban Husbandry “work to add a layer of organic urban growth, rather than replace what has taken decades to grow” (Gratz and Mintz 1998, 62).

Temporary Urbanism

Bishop and Williams (2012) study how temporary activities or interim phases of development meet the need for more flexible approaches to revitalization. They observe that both planning theory and practice have been extremely focused on permanence (Bishop and Williams 2012). This obsession with permanence leads Bishop and Williams to pose the following questions:

- Given the overwhelming evidence that cities are a complex overlay of buildings and activities that are, in one way or another, temporary, why have urbanists been so focused on permanence?
- Could temporary uses be a manifestation of the emergence of a more dynamic, flexible or adaptive urbanism, where the city is becoming more responsive to new needs, demands and preferences of its users?
- And if so, do the systems of regulation and planning need to adjust to the requirements and implications of this new fluidity?

- Can temporary activities be enabled, planned or designed in order to harness their positive characteristics without stifling their creativity? (Bishop and Williams 2012, 3-4)

While the questions asked by Bishop and Williams are somewhat beyond the scope of this professional report, they do an excellent job of setting the theoretical stage for the concept of tactical urbanism, an approach that uses temporary actions to achieve long-term results.

Tactical Urbanism

Tactical Urbanism is an approach to city-making that uses short-term action to achieve long-term change (Lydon and Garcia 2015). Lydon and Garcia apply definitions of tactical—“of or relating to small-scale actions serving a larger purpose” or “adroit in planning or maneuvering to accomplish a purpose”—to cities (2015, 2). Tactical urbanism is a nimble approach that is a stark contrast to the “slow and siloed conventional city building process” (Lydon and Garcia 2015, 3). This conventional approach often favors a one-size-fits-all solution and assumes that it is possible to control most variables (Lydon and Garcia 2015). Tactical urbanism rejects this notion and embraces the dynamic nature of cities by proposing intentional and flexible responses (Lydon and Garcia 2015).

At its core, tactical urbanism is about action and change. Lydon and Garcia wrote their book to inspire and empower their readers; they believe that tactical urbanism enables people to not just envision change but to create change as well (2015, xiii). While tactical urbanism is commonly associated with citizen-led, unsanctioned actions, many local municipalities are using tactical urbanism to improve their city.

What is Tactical Urbanism?

Tactical urbanism is fueled by the idea that small-scale, incremental actions have the power to shape our cities. Lydon and Garcia define tactical urbanism as an “approach to neighborhood building and activation using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions and policies” (2015, 2). The tactical urbanism approach features the following characteristics:

- A deliberate, phased approach to instigating change;
- An offering of local ideas for local planning challenges;
- Short-term commitment and realistic expectations;
- Low-risks, with a possibility of a high reward; and
- The development of social capital between citizens, and the building of organizational capacity between public/private institutions, non-profit/NGOs, and their constituents (Lydon et al. 2011, 1).

Tactics include build a better block, pop-up shops, food trucks, pavement to plazas, and pop-up cafes (Lydon and Garcia 2015). These tactics have been used by a range of actors in a variety of ways. For example, citizens in Baltimore City painted crosswalks at a dangerous intersection after they grew tired of asking the city to repaint the street (Bednar 2013). The New York City Department of Transportation used temporary materials and lawn chairs to create a car-free Times Square (Lydon and Garcia 2015). Tactical urbanism

initiatives often respond to problems like blight and disinvestment in cities, lack of access to parks or open space, and surplus or underutilized spaces (Lang Ho 2012, 2).

Lydon and Garcia (2015) identify three common applications of tactical urbanism. First, citizens use tactical urbanism to communicate the desire or need for change while bypassing or protesting municipal bureaucracy (Lydon and Garcia 2015). A group calling itself the San Antonio Department of Transformation created a pedestrian crosswalk at an intersection one night using paint and plungers (Sullivan 2017). The group wanted to call attention to the unsafe pedestrian conditions and show the intersection's potential to be safe for pedestrians.

Second, tactical urbanism is used as a tool for public engagement (Lydon and Garcia 2015). When tactical urbanism is included in the public charrette process it can build connections between participants and provide better insight into what residents want (Lydon et al. 2011). The City of Somerville, Massachusetts created a neighborhood planning initiative that used tactical urbanism to introduce planning concepts to people (Lydon and Garcia 2015). The initiative created a pop-up plaza on a small public parking lot (Lydon and Garcia 2015). For three days, food trucks, seating areas, and musicians transformed the parking lot (Lydon and Garcia 2015). Feedback from the pop-up plaza indicated public support for the plaza and the city has begun the process to transform the parking lot into a permanent plaza (Lydon and Garcia 2015).

Third, tactical urbanism is used as a tool to test projects before making long-term investment (Lydon and Garcia 2015). The Corona Plaza in Queens, New York was initially

built using temporary materials to allow architects to observe how people used the space and provide the public with opportunities for input (DUSP 2013). The architect stated that the public's feedback "becomes more directed when they are reacting to the experience of the space" (DUSP 2013, 20). Additionally, because the public had been involved with the design of the plaza, they have a more realistic idea of how the plaza operates and the feasibility of some design elements (DUSP 2013, 20). This has helped architects manage public expectations: "there's less disappointment, less of a sense that we're just holding out on them or imposing a design on them, and that we are in fact designing the plaza with their input" (DUSP 2013, 20).

Why Use Tactical Urbanism?

There are a number of advantages to using tactical urbanism. Tactical urbanism's use of low-cost and temporary materials makes it a low-risk approach (Lydon and Garcia 2015). It lowers the barriers to using innovative and creative solutions because cities can test out new ideas then observe and measure the results before spending a lot of money (Lydon and Garcia 2015). If the project isn't successful or doesn't have the intended effect, entire budgets aren't depleted and lessons learned can be used to adjust the project (Lydon and Garcia 2015).

Another benefit of tactical urbanism is that it allows people to experience a new vision (Lydon and Garcia 2015). When it comes to downtown revitalization, longtime residents can be "die-hard skeptics," making it difficult, if not impossible for people to reimagine their downtown as a vibrant place (Gratz and Mintz 1998, 17). In the

conventional process planners use maps, charrettes, and other illustrations to present abstract ideas to people. People must use their imaginations to make sense of these ideas.

Tactical urbanism uses a more powerful communication tool: personal experience (Lydon and Garcia 2015). Tactical urbanism can bring abstract ideas to life and help change people's perceptions about a place. A pop-up plaza with food trucks, seating, and programming allows citizens and city leaders to see that transformation is possible and experience a different version of their downtown.

Tactical Urbanism for Downtown Revitalization

Tactical urbanism can quickly inject energy and vibrancy into downtowns. Vacant storefronts and empty sidewalks can undermine revitalization efforts by projecting a negative downtown image and discouraging pedestrian activity (Smart Growth America 2015). Temporary activities can be used to activate empty spaces. This generates foot traffic, creating a "virtuous cycle" in which pedestrians support businesses and in turn attracts more pedestrians and businesses (Smart Growth America 2015). A number of cities have used tactical urbanism to activate empty spaces, attract people, and change people's perceptions about a place.

Temporary Urbanism Initiative, District of Columbia

In 2009, the District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP) formed the Temporary Urbanism Initiative to address vacant lots and empty storefronts (Pfeifer 2013). The initiative supported strategies identified in the Creative DC Action Agenda and the Retail Action Strategy (Driggs and Snowden 2012). These strategies include filling gaps in

neighborhood markets, creating new businesses concentrations, and promoting DC's creative economy (Driggs and Snowden 2012). The initiative used pop-up retail and programming to activate vacant or underused spaces (Driggs and Snowden 2012). This can generate foot traffic, attract visitors, and help people envision the area as a vibrant place (Driggs and Snowden 2012).

In 2010, DCOP created a "temporium marketplace" in a former library kiosk on H Street (Driggs and Snowden 2012). The H Street corridor was becoming known as a "trendy entertainment district" but was struggling to attract retail investment (Driggs and Snowden 2012). The temporium marketplace showcased local artists, designers, and entrepreneurs, giving them an opportunity to sell their products (Driggs and Snowden 2012). After the success of the H Street Temporium, the DCOP funded two additional temporiums (Driggs and Snowden 2012).

DCOP used the temporium shops to change negative perceptions associated with neighborhoods and encourage long-term tenants by demonstrating the potential of the location to attract customers (Driggs and Snowden 2012). These temporiums have attracted longer-term tenants for other previously vacant storefronts (Driggs and Snowden 2012). DCOP also found that the temporiums were a non-threatening way to engage the community in a conversation about future development: "instead of sowing fears of greater density or congestion that often accompany conversations about new development projects, the arts encourage everyone in the community to support local artists and entrepreneurs" (Driggs and Snowden 2012, 2).

Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team, Memphis Tennessee

The Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team operated out of the City of Memphis Mayor's Office and was funded through Bloomberg Philanthropies' Government Innovation Program (Pacello 2014). The Innovation Delivery Team was tasked with finding a way to generate neighborhood economic vitality quickly and without a lot of resources (Pacello 2014). The Innovation Delivery Team looked at three redevelopment projects in Memphis and noticed that all three projects were using tactical urbanism (Pacello 2014).

The Innovation Delivery Team was particularly inspired by one project, "A New Face for an Old Broad," which applied the concept of build a better block to Broad Avenue (BLDG Memphis 2017; Pacello 2014). Pop-up shops and restaurants filled vacant buildings; existing businesses opened their storefronts (BLDG Memphis 2017). Volunteers used paint and rollers to transform Broad Avenue by adding pedestrian bump-outs, crosswalks, and protected bike lanes (BLDG Memphis 2017). The event demonstrated the area's potential and attracted 15,000 people over two days (Young 2014). Since then, the district has seen \$20 million in investment, seven public art installations, an increase in rents and occupancy rates, 25 new businesses, and 29 properties renovated (BLDG Memphis 2017; Pacello 2014).

The Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team took the ideas behind and methods used in the event to create three programs: MEMshop, which uses pop-up retail to activate vacant storefronts; MEMobile, which promotes mobile retail and food carts; and MEMfix, which uses events and temporary uses to facilitate revitalization (Pfeifer 2013). These programs

support economic growth by acting as incubators for small businesses and allow entrepreneurs to try out business concepts and test the market in the neighborhood (Pacello 2014; Wharton 2014).

Corsicana Historic Spaces and Places

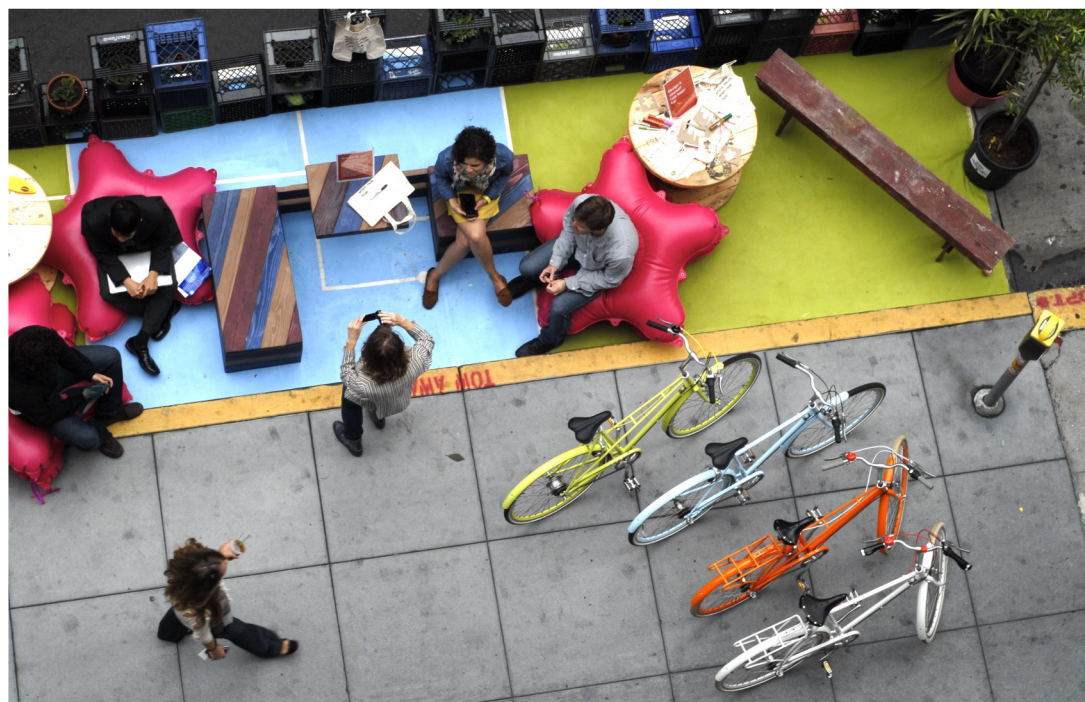
Corsicana Main Street Organization held a weekend pop-up event downtown. The event featured twelve pop-up shops in vacant storefronts or empty lots (APD 2017). A pop-up dog park was created on one vacant lot; a pop-up beer garden was created on another (APD 2017). Events were scheduled throughout the weekend and included a fashion show, performances at two theaters, a magic show, and a historic architecture tour (APD 2017). The event created an atmosphere of excitement and enthusiasm downtown and attracted a higher number of people than a typical weekend (APD 2017).

Amanda Popken with Amanda Popken Development, in partnership with the City of Corsicana and the Main Street Program, organized the pop-up event. Months in advance, Popken identified partners and cultivated a network of individuals to help with the event (Popken 2017). Popken found that a diverse network of people with different skills and roles created a strong team (Popken 2017). The temporary nature of the event provided opportunities for people to contribute to downtown vitality in a way that wasn't available before (Popken 2017). Popken approached a downtown property owner who wasn't interested in developing or selling his property (Popken 2017). However, he was willing to allow a temporary dog park on his property for the pop-up event (Popken 2017).

Tactical Urbanism Takeaways

The Temporary Urbanism Initiative, Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team, and Corsicana Historic Spaces and Places are examples of how cities have used tactical urbanism to revitalize their downtown. They demonstrate how cities have adapted tactical urbanism to their local context to find solutions to local needs. In each case, tactical urbanism was instrumental in demonstrating an area's potential, attracting people to the area, and building momentum for continued revitalization efforts.

Examples of Tactical Urbanism



Examples of Tactical Urbanism



03

Methodology



The purpose of this professional report is to create a downtown revitalization plan for Grand Prairie. My goal is to use best practices and creative solutions to design a plan that is visionary yet practical and can serve as the framework for future revitalization efforts. Strategic interventions are intended to gain City Council support and citizen buy-in and lay the foundation for more traditional downtown planning efforts in the future.

I used observations from the field and my time as a City employee, information from the City website, and analysis of downtown planning documents to compile a background profile of downtown Grand Prairie. My goal was to document existing physical conditions, recent investments, and other trends, then assess the profile to identify downtown needs and opportunities.

I served on the City's Downtown Task Force, which was a part of an initiative by the City Manager's Office to explore redevelopment in Grand Prairie. In recent years, the City's attention and excitement has been focused on new development—especially development occurring along the State Highway 161 Corridor. This initiative was used to bring Council's attention to redevelopment in older areas of the City.

Members of the Downtown Task Force were from many different departments—Planning, Fire, Police, Economic Development, and the City Manager's Office—and represented a range of perspectives in their knowledge of the City, experience with downtown, and understanding of City Council. The goal of the Task Force was to engage City Council in a discussion about revitalizing downtown and obtain Council support for future revitalization efforts. The Downtown Task Force met over a period of several

months to discuss downtown opportunities and revitalization ideas. The Downtown Task Force presented their findings to City Council at the Redevelopment Workshop. Appendix A contains notes from the Downtown Task Force meetings. Appendix B contains the material presented to City Council at the Redevelopment Workshop.

04

Downtown Grand Prairie



Downtown Overview

Location and Access

Downtown Grand Prairie is located off of State Highway 161 and accessible by Interstate 30. The downtown is roughly 347 acres and bounded by State Highway 161 on the west and Belt Line Road on the east. The Downtown Task Force designated the area north of the railroad tracks as Phase 1 and the area south of the tracks as Phase 2 as shown in Figure 1.

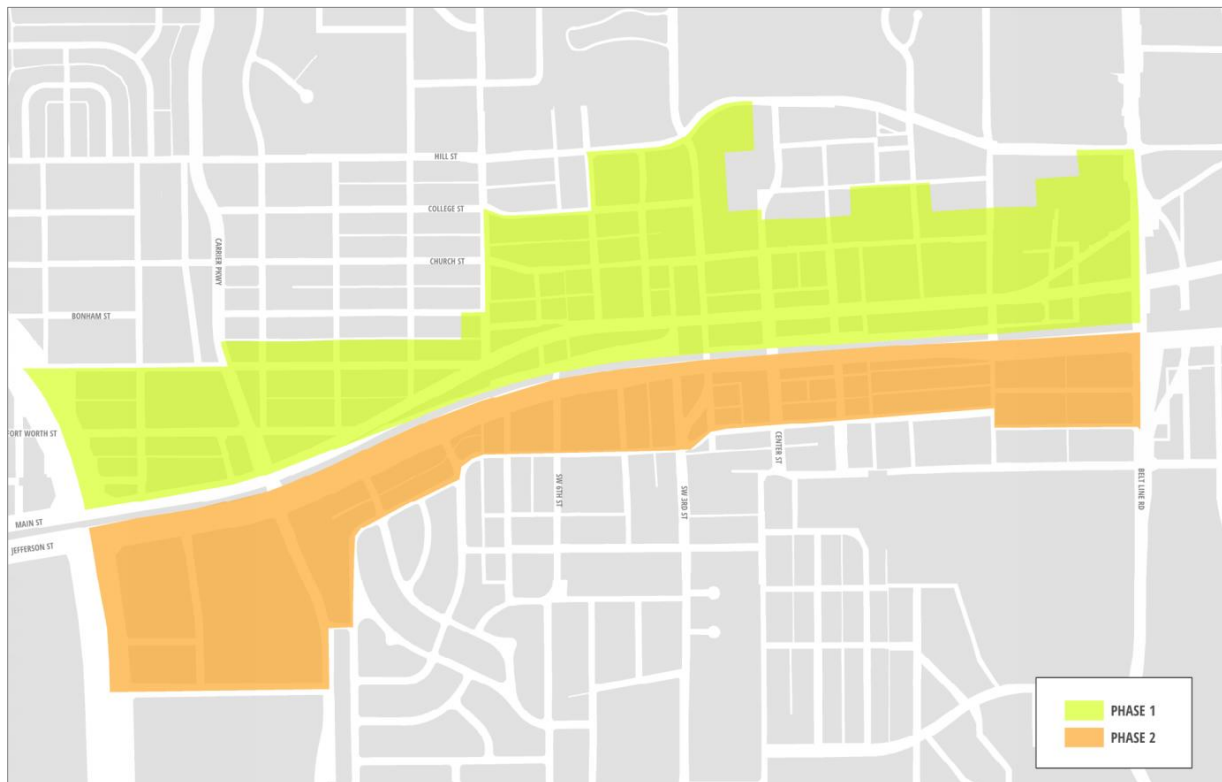


Figure 1. Downtown Grand Prairie, Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Main Street is a state highway (TX-180) and functions as one; it moves vehicles (including a significant number of 18-wheeler trucks) through downtown Grand Prairie.

Since Main Street is a state highway and controlled by Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT), the City of Grand Prairie does not have authority to redesign Main Street.

Auto-Centric Form

The built environment more closely resembles suburban-style, auto-centered development than a walkable urban core. Most of the buildings are setback from Main Street with surface parking lots in front of the buildings. The posted speed limit along Main Street is 45 mph and the pavement width is about 75 feet from curb to curb. The posted speed limit decreases to 30 mph at the downtown core. A number of Downtown Task Force members observed that downtown doesn't feel like a downtown, that cars speed down Main Street, and that walking downtown doesn't feel safe.

Two blocks in the downtown core more closely resemble a traditional downtown with on-street parking and buildings that are situated close to the street. These two blocks are where the City has made most of its investments. Figure 2 shows city investments and the two blocks that more closely resemble a downtown.



Figure 2. City investments downtown.

Main Street Façade Improvement Program

The Economic Development Department developed the Main Street Façade Program to incentivize downtown property owners to make improvements to their buildings. The program offers financial assistance to property owners in exchange for following design guidelines. The Main Street Façade Program’s urban design guidelines are intended to: create a vibrant walkable community center, preserve the integrity of the historic building fabric, and provide architectural guidelines that strengthen the block face, complement the existing aesthetic, and support pedestrian scaled walkability (COGP EDD 2010).

Regulatory Framework

Downtown Grand Prairie is within the Central Business District (CBD) Overlay. Some of the design guidelines for the Façade Improvement Program were incorporated into the CBD Overlay regulations. While participants in the Main Street Façade Program are required to meet these guidelines, properties within the CBD Overlay are not required to meet the guidelines. The design guidelines are presented as suggestions and recommendations. Design controls can be used to create a walkable, pedestrian-oriented environment. However, as written, City Staff have no means to enforce the guidelines. In order to have more influence over the type of development that occurs downtown, the guidelines should be rewritten as requirements. Additionally, requirements similar to the following could be included to achieve more pedestrian-oriented development:

- Setback maximums;
- Building height minimums;
- No curb cuts for parking lots in front of buildings; and
- Wider sidewalks.

Downtown Challenges and Opportunities

I used observations from the field, discussions from the Downtown Task Force meetings, and planning documents and studies to identify downtown challenges and opportunities. The following tables summarize downtown challenges and opportunities. Critical factors for success are discussed in the following section.

Table 1: Summary of Downtown Challenges

Challenge	Explanation/Implication
Lack of Vision & Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on individual projects rather than downtown whole • No way to prioritize spending or evaluate projects
Project Planning Mentality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about downtown as a collection of buildings and sites • Value big, expensive, distinct architecture
Focus on other Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City actions, decisions, and support for the 161 Corridor may come at the expense of downtown
Limiting Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downtown is an economic drain rather than an economic generator • Bars are seedy and shouldn't be allowed rather than a place that attracts people • The private sector should invest first rather than City action can attract private investment
Main Street is a Highway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TXDOT control over design • Wide pavement, high speed • High volume of truck traffic • Not pedestrian friendly • Doesn't feel like a downtown
No Citizen Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of drive to revitalize downtown comes from Staff
No Downtown Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No signage directing people to downtown • Many people don't know where downtown is • Nothing to capture people's attention and get them to stop when they are driving through downtown

Table 2: Summary of Downtown Assets and Opportunities

Asset	Opportunity
Farmers Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers Market has no room to expand • Pop-up retail in vacant storefronts could house overflow vendors
Uptown Theater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify restaurants willing to stay open later and create an after-hours special to give people something to do after shows
Public Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception that there isn't enough downtown parking • Better signage and parking maps could help change that perception
City Hall and City Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Hall and City Offices are important downtown anchors • Adjustments to existing programming and activities could help activate downtown several times a week

Critical Success Factors

Identify Partners & Cultivate Stakeholders

Ash + Lime consultants Rik Adamski and Brandon Castillo shared some of their observations with Downtown Task Force members from the Planning Department. Adamski and Castillo stated that there didn't appear to be many stakeholders engaged in Grand Prairie's downtown and that City Staff is taking the lead in championing downtown revitalization. This is the reverse of what their firm has seen in other cities; often citizen groups need help getting the city's support for their initiatives. In this meeting Castillo describes what he calls the triangle to effect change. The triangle is composed of three groups: citizen stakeholders, city staff, and elected officials. Change takes place with support of two of the three groups. Castillo (2015) first wrote about this idea in a blogpost about how cities work and the idea has evolved over the years (Brandon Castillo, November 15, 2017, e-mail message to author).

Marc Maxwell, the City Manager of Sulphur Springs, describes the importance of fostering inclusivity during the revitalization process (Maxwell 2017). Getting citizen buy-in is critical for success; recruiting "zealous nuts" (passionate individuals who are highly thought of in the community) can engage other stakeholders and get them excited about downtown (Maxwell 2017).

Gaining support from a second group is critical for downtown revitalization. Adamski and Castillo (2017) identified potential revitalization partners such as businesses interested in a mural on their building, property owners willing to host pop-up retailers,

and organizations with programs that could tie into downtown. Tactical urbanism interventions could be used to engage these stakeholders and cultivate more. As people see tactical urbanism interventions taking place, they'll begin to pay attention to downtown. Hopefully these interventions spark people's imagination, giving them ideas about how they can help improve downtown.

Expand the City's Approach

The City of Grand Prairie has a tendency to use highly visible projects (often expensive, architecturally significant municipal buildings or recreational facilities) to attract private development. For example, the Epic (a recreation center that includes a fitness center, theater, library, radio station, recording studio, amphitheater, pub and lounge area) and Epic Waters (a \$100 Million indoor water park) anchor Grand Central Park (City of Grand Prairie Tourist Information 2017; Gallagher 2017; The Epic 2017). In 2017 the City of Grand Prairie issued a request for qualifications for a "one of a kind opportunity" to develop three parcels within Grand Central Park which is located less than three miles south of downtown (City of Grand Prairie 2017a). The City envisions the location as a "destination for entertainment, unique and interesting restaurants, and high quality, full service hotels" (City of Grand Prairie 2017a). Figure 3 shows downtown in relation to Grand Central Park and new development along the 161 corridor.

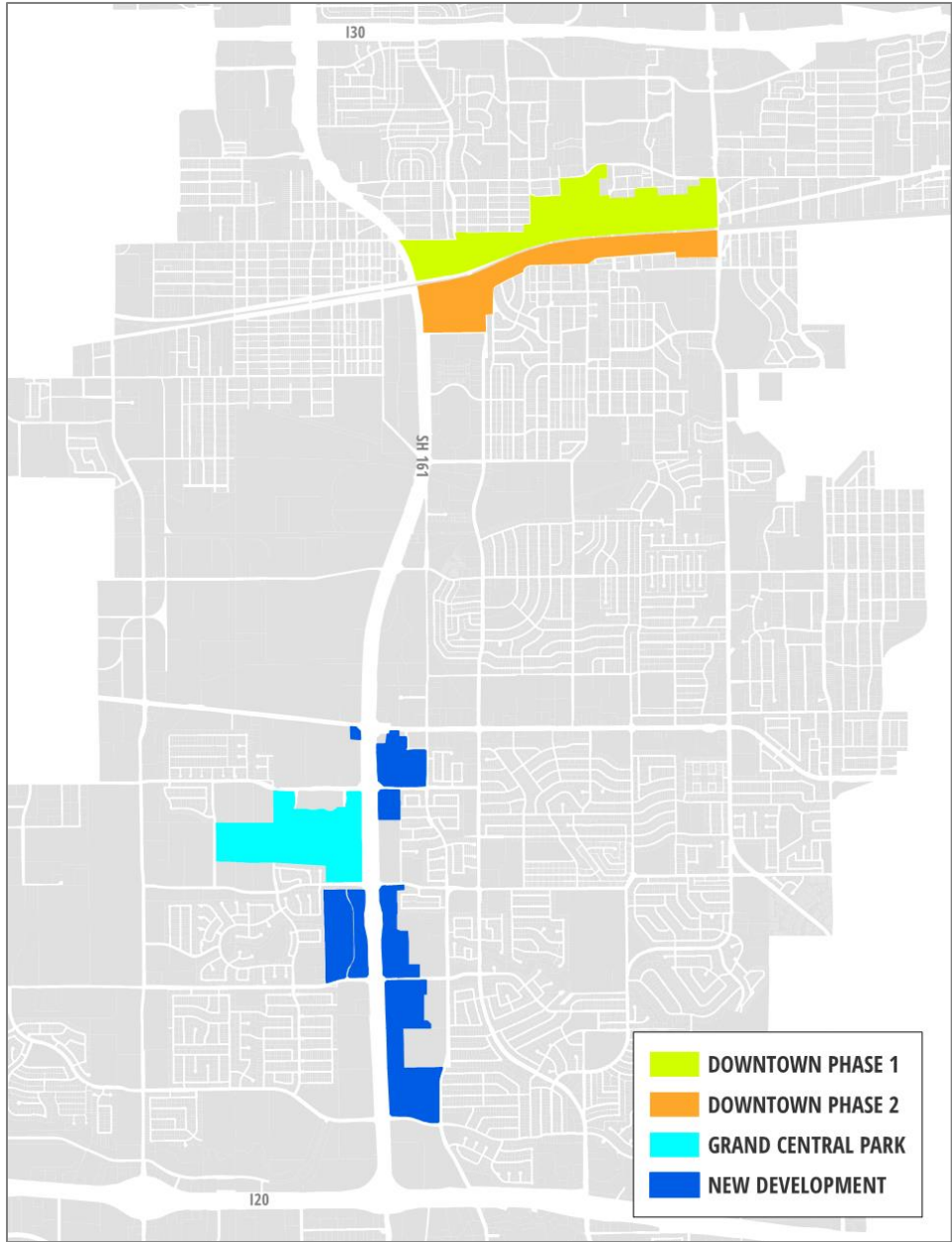


Figure 3. Downtown Grand Prairie, Grand Central Park, and 161 Developments.

While project like these can be exciting community assets, they alone don't make a great place or city. Downtown revitalization is different and requires more than project planning. Tactical urbanism could be used to complement these larger projects as well as

encourage more incremental efforts like what Gratz and Mintz (1998) call urban husbandry. This approach is a stark contrast to Grand Prairie's typical approach to development. Tactical urbanism can be used to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of this alternative approach to City leaders. The use of small-scale and low-cost interventions can be used to complement some of the large-scale and high-cost investments the City has made in the past and create the foundation for future investments.

Tactical Urbanism for Downtown Grand Prairie

Gaining support from a second group is critical to revitalizing downtown. Tactical urbanism can help by engaging stakeholders, identifying partners, and getting people excited about downtown. It can be used to complement ongoing City efforts and provides City leaders with additional tools to revitalize downtown.

05

Activate Downtown



Introduction

Over the past ten to fifteen years, the City of Grand Prairie has made significant investments in the downtown area. Uptown Theater, Market Square, and Fire Station No. 1 are important downtown anchors and civic buildings. The Main Street Façade program and streetscape enhancements have improved downtown aesthetics. Events like the Farmers Market, Main Street Fest, and Hatch Chili Fest attract people to downtown Grand Prairie. The City plans to consolidate City Hall and downtown offices into a single building and build a new civic plaza in the next few years.

In August of 2017, the City Manager's Office created four task forces as part of an initiative to explore redevelopment opportunities in Grand Prairie. The task forces met over several months and presented their ideas to City Council at the Redevelopment Workshop held on November 1st. This plan grew out of the Downtown Task Force's ideas and discussions and is intended to serve as a guide to implement recommendations presented at the Redevelopment Workshop.

The Downtown Task Force's goal was to identify high impact actions intended to catalyze local investment and build momentum and excitement. The Task Force identified tactical urbanism as a tool capable of doing just that. While some downtown issues will need to be addressed through a more conventional approach, tactical urbanism can be used to energize City leaders and engage downtown stakeholders, which is a critical first step to revitalizing downtown.

Defining a Collective Vision

Developing a vision is an important part of downtown revitalization. A good vision inspires people to invest their time, money, energy, and ideas into downtown. The Downtown Task Force created a preliminary vision designed to kick-off revitalization efforts. The Task Force will use input from downtown stakeholders to refine the vision with the intent that a vision statement will be adopted by City Council.

Vision Building Blocks

The preliminary downtown vision has three elements: strong identity and sense of place, great public spaces, and an active streetscape.

- Strong Identity & Sense of Place: Downtown Grand Prairie is a destination area with a healthy mix of restaurants, offices, services, and usable public space. Design standards promote a pedestrian-oriented form, enhance the public realm, and improve downtown's function while allowing the downtown aesthetic to develop organically over time. Branding and wayfinding signage reinforce a sense of place. Downtown gateways use art and signage to create a sense of arrival.
- Great Public Spaces: Downtowns are typically thought of as the heart of a city. Great public spaces cultivate this idea. These spaces complement and connect downtown restaurants, shops, and businesses. Downtown is like Grand Prairie's front porch; it is a hub of activity with places for everyone.
- Active Streetscape: Active streetscapes help create a vibrant downtown. Interesting buildings and window displays, wide sidewalks, places to sit, and outdoor cafes create an enjoyable environment for pedestrians.



Strong Identity & Sense of Place



Downtown Grand Prairie is a **destination** area with a healthy mix of restaurants, offices, services, and usable public space. Design standards promote a **pedestrian-oriented form**, enhance the public realm, and improve downtown's function while allowing the downtown aesthetic to develop organically over time. Branding and wayfinding signage reinforce a **sense of place**. Downtown gateways use art and signage to create a sense of arrival.



Photo Credits: Page Muller on Unsplash, Clem Onojeghwo on Unsplash, Lance Anderson on Unsplash, Mac Glassford on Unsplash, Jazmin Quaynor on Unsplash, Mike Petrucci on Unsplash, and Samuel Zeller on Unsplash.



Great Public Spaces

Downtowns are typically thought of as the **heart of a city**. Great public spaces cultivate this idea. These spaces complement and connect downtown restaurants, shops, and businesses. Downtown is like Grand Prairie's front porch; it is a hub of activity with **places for everyone**.





Active Streetscape



Active streetscapes help create a **vibrant** downtown. Interesting buildings and window displays, wide sidewalks, places to sit, and outdoor cafes create an **enjoyable environment** for pedestrians.



Activate Downtown

Activate Downtown uses tactical urbanism interventions to catalyze downtown revitalization. Tactical urbanism is an approach to neighborhood building using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyze long-term change. The idea behind tactical urbanism is that small-scale actions can add up to something big.

Tactical urbanism uses materials that are temporary and low-cost, which makes it a low-risk approach. Many revitalization strategies require a lot of time and money up front; it can be years before downtowns see results. Tactical urbanism is a tool that can be used immediately. It allows people to try out new ideas then observe and measure the results. When it is time to invest in something permanent, the City can use lessons learned during interim phases to make smarter decisions and create better designs.

While the projects recommended in this plan support the vision building blocks, their primary purpose is to attract citizen buy-in and Council support by demonstrating downtown's potential to be a vibrant destination. The specific goals are:

- Engage downtown stakeholders and define a collective downtown vision;
- Inspire people to invest time, money, energy, and ideas into downtown; and
- Identify partners and attract investors for future efforts.

Phase 1: City Initiated Demonstration Projects

City initiated tactical urbanism demonstration projects are designed to make a big impact. The Downtown Task Force has selected three demonstration projects: curb extensions on Center Street, an interim civic plaza near City Hall, and traffic calming on NW 2nd Street. Demonstration project goals are to engage downtown stakeholders by demonstrating downtown's potential and to introduce tactical urbanism as a tool that can be used to improve downtown. These projects are intended to get people excited about downtown and inspire them to look for ways that they can help make downtown a more vibrant place.

Since these projects will be used to engage people, community outreach is an important part of each project. As a part of community outreach for the demonstration projects, the Downtown Task Force will:

- Set up and continually update a website, webpage on the City website, or social media account for Activate Downtown so that people can easily access information about the projects and submit comments;
- Send flyers to downtown property owners, businesses, and key stakeholders that notifies them of the project and encourages them to provide feedback; and
- Place signs with project information and website address at the project location.

Demonstration Project 1: Curb Extensions/Median on Center St.

Overview

Curb extensions make Center Street safe for pedestrians.

Pedestrian Crossing

The pavement width of Center Street is much wider than typical downtown streets. This means that it takes pedestrians a longer time to cross the street.

On-Street Parking

Underutilized parking spaces could be repurposed to slow traffic down.

Unused Pavement

Unused pavement at Center St intersections contribute to the wide expanse of pavement a pedestrian must cross.

Faded Crosswalk

The existing crosswalk is faded making it less obvious to drivers that they should watch out for pedestrians.



Figure 4. Center Street, Facing South. (Author)



Figure 5. Center Street, Facing North. (Author)

Improvements

Curb bulb outs shorten the distances pedestrians must walk and make it easier for them to see oncoming vehicles.

High-visibility ladder crosswalk markings are more visible to approaching vehicles and have been shown to improve yielding behavior.

Center St median calms traffic. Flowers and plantings improve aesthetics.

Materials

Barrier Elements: Flexible delineator posts, planters with plantings

Surface Treatments: Traffic paint, colored treatments

Materials Budget: \$12,000

Below: Similar tactic and materials at an intersection in Chicago.

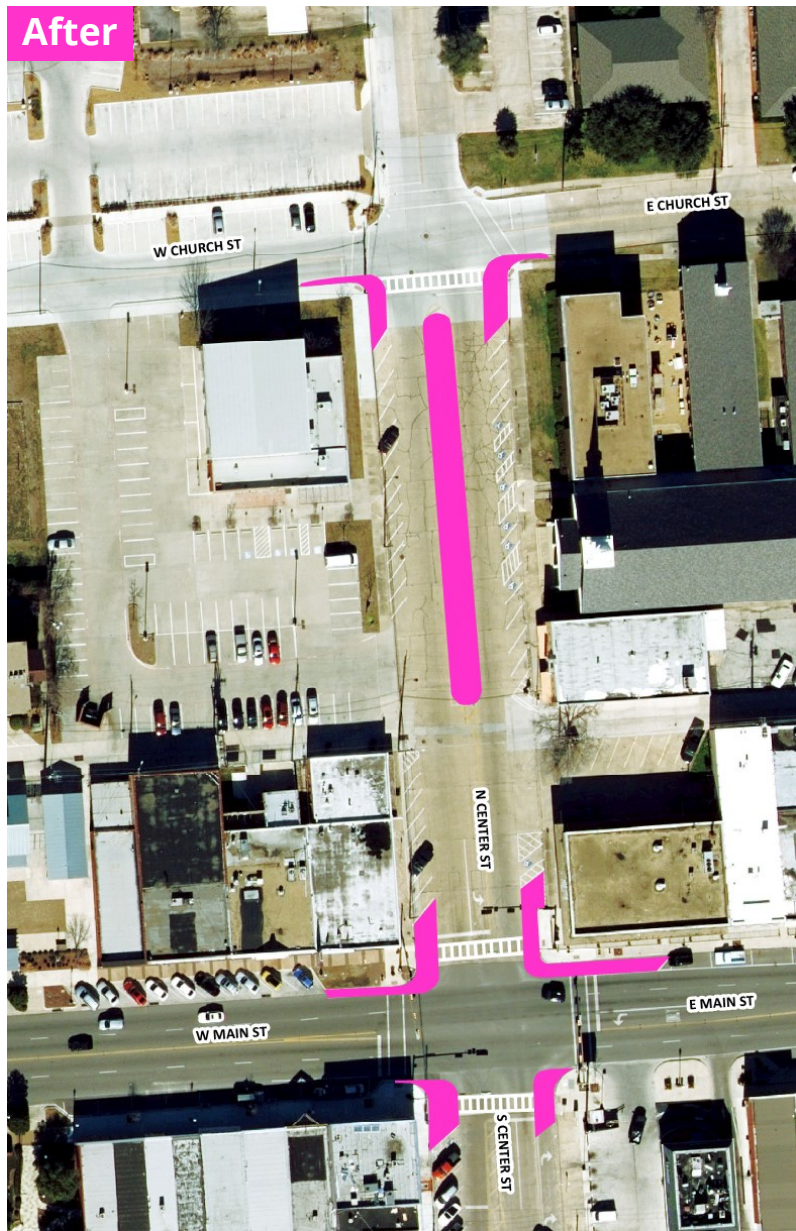


Figure 6. Lincoln Hub, Chicago. (John Greenfield)



Figure 7. Lincoln Hub, Chicago. (John Greenfield)

Demonstration Project 2: Interim Civic Plaza

Overview

Permanent installation of a civic plaza remains a few years away. A temporary or interim plaza allows us to test out design ideas and get people excited about things to come.

Why It Works

An interim plaza allows us to observe how people use it and get their input on the final design. This gives the permanent plaza a better chance at succeeding.

Added bonus: the interim plaza gets people in the habit of using the space. When it is time to install the permanent plaza we already have a built-in user base.

Materials

Barrier Elements: Large granite blocks, flexible delineators, planters

Surface Treatments: Traffic paint, colored treatments

Landscape Elements: Plants, trees, and other landscape elements

Street Furniture: Moveable chairs and tables

Materials Budget: \$40,000

Programming

Connect the interim plaza to existing downtown events and use programming to attract people.

Programming Budget: \$15,000



Figure 8. Interim Plaza in New York. (NACTO)



Figure 9. Interim Plaza in New York. (NACTO)

Demonstration Project 3: Traffic Calming on NW 2nd St.

Overview

NW 2nd St is wide and straight. As a result drivers tend to speed. This along with the lack of crosswalks makes NW 2nd St unsafe for pedestrians.

Testing out various forms of traffic calming like curb extensions, chicanes, and on-street parking will allow us to see what works.

Materials

Barrier Elements: Flexible delineators, planters

Surface Treatments: Traffic paint, colored treatments

Materials Budget: \$5,000

Below: Similar improvements and materials.

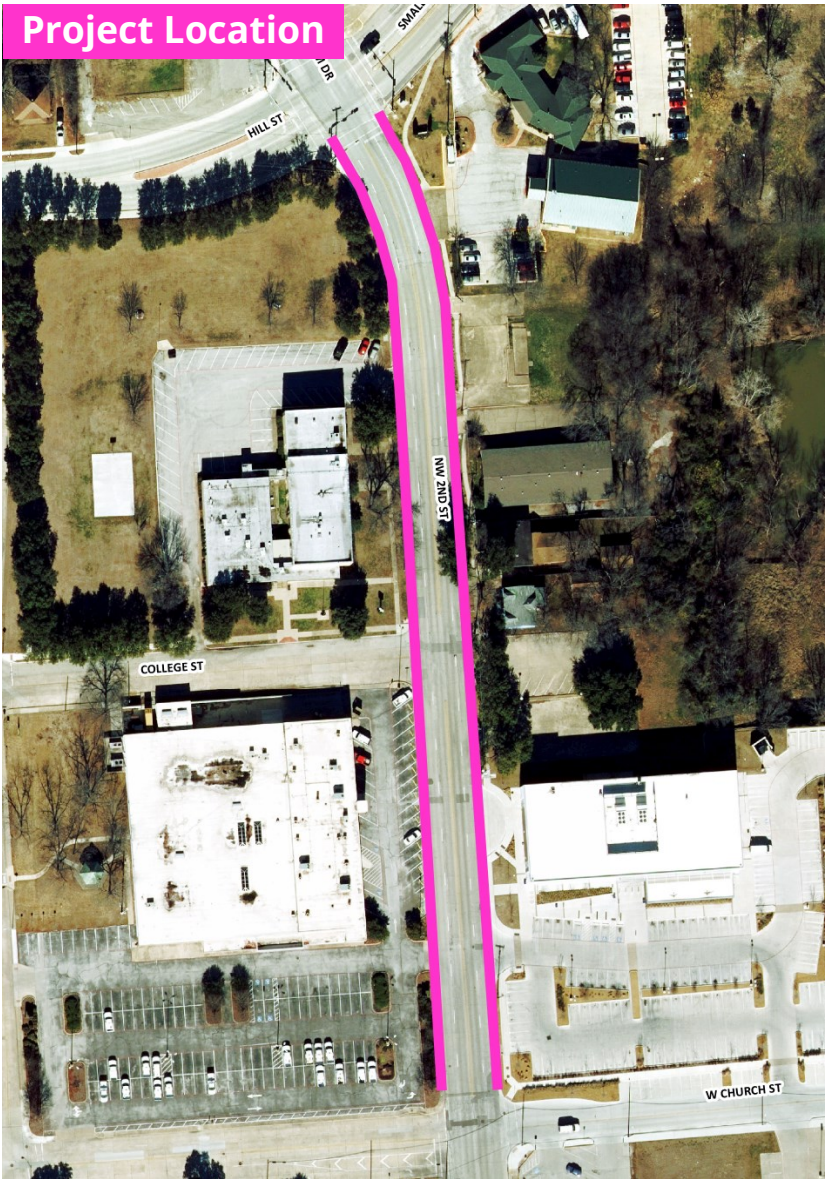


Figure 10. Curb Extension. (City of Seattle)



Figure 11. Traffic Calming in Fayetteville. (J. T. Wampler)

Phase 2: Downtown Showcase Pop-Up Event

In the second phase of Activate Downtown, the City will put on a downtown showcase pop-up weekend event. Big special events like Main Street Fest are great at attracting people, but these kinds of events don't occur on a regular basis. The downtown showcase is a chance to demonstrate downtown's potential to attract people on a regular basis. We want people to be able to see themselves visiting downtown Grand Prairie on a regular day.

Downtown Showcase

Programming and pop-ups will be strategically placed downtown to connect existing assets and encourage people to walk around. The Downtown Task Force will encourage owners of existing businesses and restaurants to open their doors during the event and find ways to showcase their business. This will help existing businesses take advantage of the increased number of people downtown. Pop-up retail will activate vacant storefronts, giving local and regional entrepreneurs a chance to see how their business might do downtown. Pop-up retail adds to the number of downtown activities and allows property owners to showcase spaces available for rent.

The Farmers Market draws people downtown on Saturday mornings. It ends in the early afternoon which means that Market Square is available for events and activities the rest of the weekend. Uptown Theater is another downtown anchor. Staff could offer tours of the historic theater during the day; this might encourage people attending the event to

stick around for an evening show. Things like a food truck court, pop-up dog park, and temporary beer garden can be used to activate vacant land or parking lots.

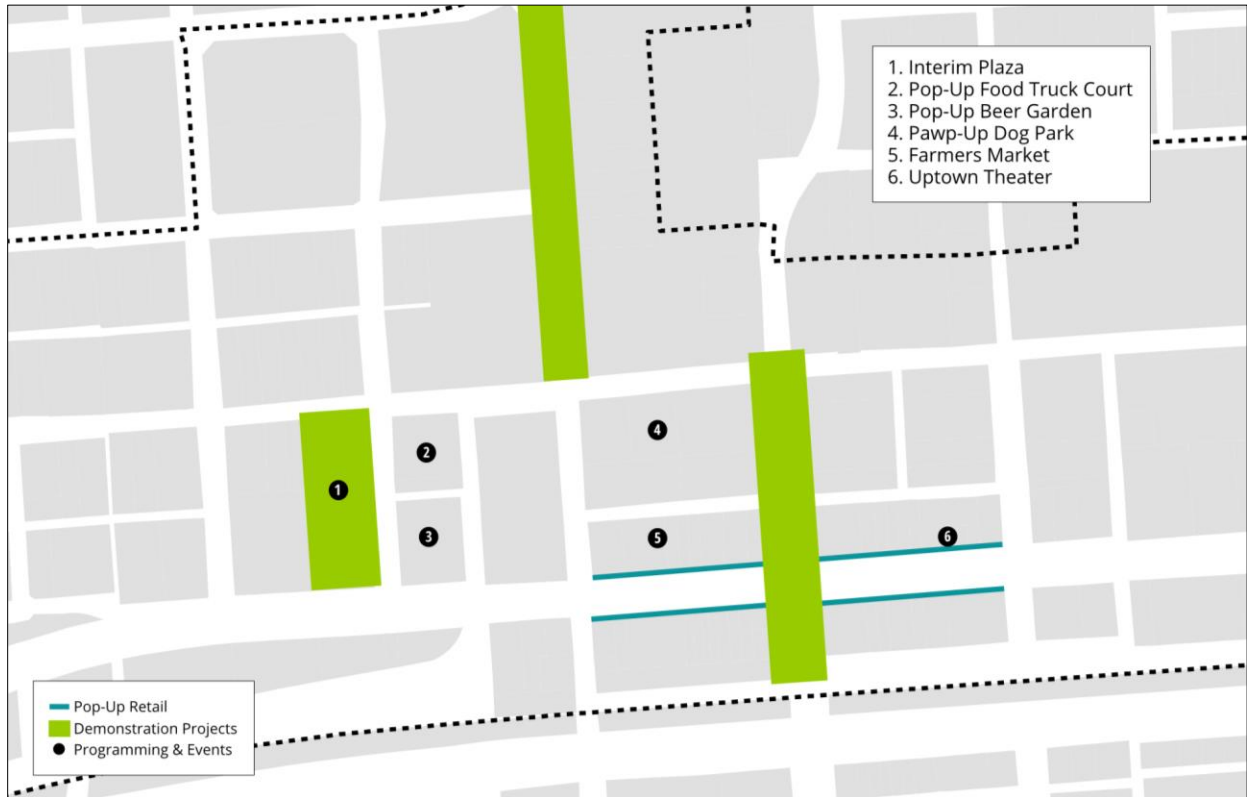


Figure 12. Potential locations for Downtown Showcase.

Promotion

In addition to promoting the event through regular channels, the Task Force will invite professionals in the real estate and hospitality industries. Grand Prairie Tourism offers quarterly bus tours of Grand Prairie destinations to local hotel concierges and management. The tour stops downtown and the downtown showcase is a perfect opportunity to show local hotel concierges and management what downtown Grand Prairie can offer their guests. The Downtown Task Force will coordinate with Grand Prairie

Tourism so that the quarterly bus tour takes place during the showcase event.

Additionally, the Task Force will invite real estate professionals, local developers, and business associations to the event. Real estate professionals are more likely to lease space, new businesses are more likely to locate, and developers are more likely to invest in a vibrant downtown with lots of people and activities.

Phase 3: Activation Overlay

In the third phase of Activate Downtown, the Task Force will create an activation overlay for downtown. In the first two phases, the Task Force introduces the idea of tactical urbanism as a tool for downtown revitalization. In this phase, the Task Force makes this tool available to the public. The Task Force will use experiences from demonstration projects and the pop-up event to create a framework to allow temporary tactical urbanism projects. Table 3 lists some of the questions the Task Force will consider when creating the framework. The goal is to find a way to ensure that projects are safe and legal without stifling creativity.

This framework would function similarly to the City's Special Event Permit. People who wished to initiate a tactical urbanism project within the Activation Overlay would be required to submit an application to the City for review. The Task Force will oversee the process and coordinate review with various departments.

Table 3: Summary Framework

Category	Question
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does the proposal support the downtown vision?• What need or shortcoming does the proposal seek to address?
Project Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific criteria to evaluate merits of proposal?• Set categories of projects?
Number of Days	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the appropriate amount of time?• Should different types of projects have different number of days?
Implementation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What departments need to be a part of the review?• Who is the designated contact for each department?• What information do they need to complete a review?
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limit materials to a list of approved materials?• Evaluate materials on a case-by-case basis?

Conclusion

Activate Downtown is designed to kick-off efforts to revitalize downtown Grand Prairie. The plan begins with City-initiated demonstration projects which will be used to capture people's attention and get them thinking about downtown. Throughout the process, the Downtown Task Force will cultivate downtown stakeholders and advocates. In Phase 2, the City of Grand Prairie will partner with these stakeholders to put on the Downtown Showcase, a week-end pop-up event. The Downtown Showcase will feature pop-up retail, restaurants, and activities. The purpose of the event is to demonstrate downtown's potential to be a vibrant destination. The City will demonstrate how tactical urbanism can be used to revitalize downtown in the first two phases. In the third phase, the City will create an activation overlay to make the tool available to the public. The goal of the overlay is to encourage downtown businesses, property owners, and stakeholders to test out new ideas.

Activate Downtown is just the beginning—efforts to revitalize downtown shouldn't end with the completion of Phase 3. The ideas and recommendations in this plan are designed to generate interest in downtown, cultivate stakeholders, and build momentum for future revitalization efforts. After the implementation of Activate Downtown, the City of Grand Prairie will have a clear downtown vision and a solid network of downtown stakeholders to serve as the foundation for future revitalization efforts.

06

Conclusion



Tactical urbanism is an alternative approach to city-building. Characteristics of the tactical urbanism approach—temporary, low-cost, and incremental—contrast with the characteristics of the conventional approach. Despite this contrast, the benefits of tactical urbanism are most obvious when tactical urbanism works with the conventional planning approach (Lydon and Garcia 2015). Cities have used tactical urbanism to help citizens experience planning concepts, test out ideas before investing capital funds, and build momentum in order to implement existing plans (Lydon and Garcia 2015; Pfeiffer 2013). Tactical urbanism is practical—it is flexible, enables people to make informed design decisions, and gets immediate results—but it is also a bit whimsical. It brings excitement, creativity, and fun to planning and city-building.

Downtown Grand Prairie has a number of issues that cannot be solved by tactical urbanism. However, one of the biggest challenges to revitalization efforts is the lack of stakeholder and Council support. Tactical urbanism is an effective way to engage stakeholders and demonstrate downtown potential. Demonstration projects can be implemented quickly to capitalize on the momentum created by the Downtown Task Force's presentation to Council at the Redevelopment Workshop.

As stakeholder and Council support for downtown Grand Prairie grows, the City will be increasingly better positioned to initiate more conventional approaches to downtown revitalization. The City of Grand Prairie can learn from surrounding cities. In 2004, the City of Arlington adopted a downtown master plan, which included things like recommendations for street design and building design, ideas for incentives, and revised

parking policies (City of Arlington 2004). Arlington has begun the process to develop a new downtown plan and could provide Grand Prairie with insight into the planning process and lessons on what policies from the previous plan worked (Arlington 2017). The City of Lewisville's City Hall is located downtown in front of Wayne Ferguson Plaza (Lewisville 2017). The Wayne Ferguson Plaza and other downtown public spaces connect City Hall with Main Street. Grand Prairie has begun the process to consolidate downtown offices into a single building; these plans include a civic plaza. The City of Grand Prairie could learn from the City of Lewisville's plaza. As support for revitalization grows and the vision for downtown solidifies, the City of Grand Prairie can look to surrounding cities for ideas and examples.

Tactical urbanism also provides another lens through which we can view the city. David Harvey states "the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights" (2008, 23). The right to remake our cities is an interesting concept—especially when thinking about how most cities approach development. Zoning regulations, development review, and other regulatory barriers may unintentionally infringe on this right. Tactical urbanism cuts through the bureaucratic red tape, making it easier for people to exercise the right to remake our cities. It shifts the planning mentality from How do we regulate this? to How do we make this happen? This shift creates the possibility of a more collaborative city-making process.

Appendix A: Downtown Task Force Meeting Notes

September 6, 2017

- Purpose of workshop presentation is to gain traction for downtown revitalization and get support from Council – possibly funding. Generate enthusiasm.
- Downtown boundaries from Belt Line to 161. Phase 1 is Main Street. Phase 2 is Jefferson.
- Property acquisition programs. What have other cities done? How are other cities spending their downtown money? Possible resistance from a council member who thinks the City should not be in the real estate business.
- Need for vision. What should the strategy be? Who are we trying to attract?
- Identity/branding of downtown. Many people don't even know where downtown is.
- TXDOT won't approve downtown signage for 161.
- Gateways to downtown?
- Regular activity
- City Hall improvement plan and plaza. Could be a catalyst project.
- Attracting developers: there hasn't been interest from developers. How do we attract? Consider infrastructure improvements to incentivize developers.
- New frontage roads will open up undeveloped tracts near downtown. Greenfield development is easier. Potential?
- City Council mindset – used to existing or good enough. Need to raise expectations and get buy-in.
- Mowing along RR ROW – not frequent enough. Hire independent contractor?
- Walkable. Need to make downtown more walkable. Main Street is a Highway – lots of traffic and trucks speeding through. Not a good environment for pedestrians.
- Traffic Calming. Options to slow traffic on Main Street. Possibility of using temporary demonstration projects/tactical urbanism to explore options.
- Arts, culture, City's roots, murals, public art.
- Craft breweries.

- Need for a flexible approach.
- Economic Development has contract with Ash + Lime to achieve low hanging fruit.

September 26, 2017

- Sense of urgency – Grand Prairie has fallen behind what other cities have done with their downtowns.
- Present success stories from other cities to City Council.
- Use Tactical Urbanism projects to make downtown more walkable. Areas downtown are not walkable. A couple of intersections where cars travel fast and walking feels unsafe.
- Ash + Lime was hired in 2015 to look at ways to activate downtown. They've been rehired. Will attend next meeting.
- Next meeting will be a walking tour of downtown. Meet at City Hall.
- Council Redevelopment Workshop will be in November. Work on presentation in between now and next meeting. Short and direct to keep their attention focused.
- Task Force will make the recommendation that we continue to meet after the workshop.

October 10, 2017

- Walking tour with Ash + Lime.
- Discussed new footprint of new City Hall complex and plaza. Will be closing off 3rd street to build a connector building. Huge building – will have to pay attention to the back of the building and find ways to activate the space.
- Sidewalks outside of downtown core are in poor condition – up against curb, telephone pole in the middle, crumbling in some areas. Number of curb cuts disrupts walking experience.
- Lots of unused ROW (not drive lane). Main Street is wide; doesn't feel walkable or safe.
- Observed vehicles speeding & running stop signs. 18-wheeler trucks driving through downtown.

- Identified several potential locations for tactical urbanism. When presenting to Council be strategic in the materials shown in examples. Don't want them to be put off of idea because of materials.

October 25, 2017

Downtown Task Force members from the Planning Department met with representatives from Ash + Lime to discuss the upcoming presentation to City Council and downtown revitalization in general.

- Seems to be little connection to adjacent neighborhoods. Better integration is needed so residents feel like downtown is an asset they benefit from rather than a place where large events infringes on their neighborhood.
- People need to be able to find downtown and know where it is. How do we get people to identify with it?
- There currently isn't anything to capture people driving through downtown or grab their attention and get them to stop.
- Grand Prairie has typically taken the approach of spending lots of money to do big projects (like the \$100 million for the Epic). Maybe it is time to try a different approach like tactical urbanism.
- Ash + Lime observed that there aren't many stakeholders engaged in downtown, that City Staff is taking the lead in championing downtown. This is the reverse of what they've seen in other cities where citizen groups need help getting their city to pay attention to them/their initiatives.
- City of Austin has recurring budget for neighborhood groups to do tactical urbanism projects. Could propose something similar to Council.
- Triangle to effect change – city leaders, city staff, and citizens. You really need 2 of the 3. Right now we have staff and need to get support from a second group.
- Need to identify stakeholders. What existing businesses will benefit from revitalization?
- How do we get the right types of businesses? Have a list of the types of businesses we want. Use 380 agreements?
- A number of GPISD programs. Potential partner.
- Possibility of having a Main Street Manager.
- Get leaders to see downtown as an economic generator.

October 26, 2017

- Presentation preview with City Manager.
- Add crosswalk art and murals to presentation.
- Current zoning doesn't allow bars or breweries. Still a perception that bars are seedy and we shouldn't allow them. Discuss how bars have evolved and use examples from the DFW area.
- Recommendation should include looking at zoning code to remove outdated policies and revise to allow the types of businesses that we want and that thrive downtown.

Appendix B: Redevelopment Workshop Presentation



Photo Source: Mauro Mora on Unsplash.

Downtown Task Force

Committee Co-Chairs

Rita Heep

Steve Dye

Committee Members

Andrew Fortune

Christy Martinez

David Jones

Savannah Ware

Steve Kuykendall



Photo Source: Xochi on Unsplash, Mike Petrucci on Unsplash, Matt Briney on Unsplash.

Tonight's Presentation

1. Task Force Goals
2. Downtown Today
3. Downtown Tomorrow
4. Downtown Success Stories
5. Tactical Urbanism
6. Our Recommendations



Photo Source: Roman Kraft on Unsplash, Samuel Zeller on Unsplash, Rob Bye on Unsplash.

Task Force Goals

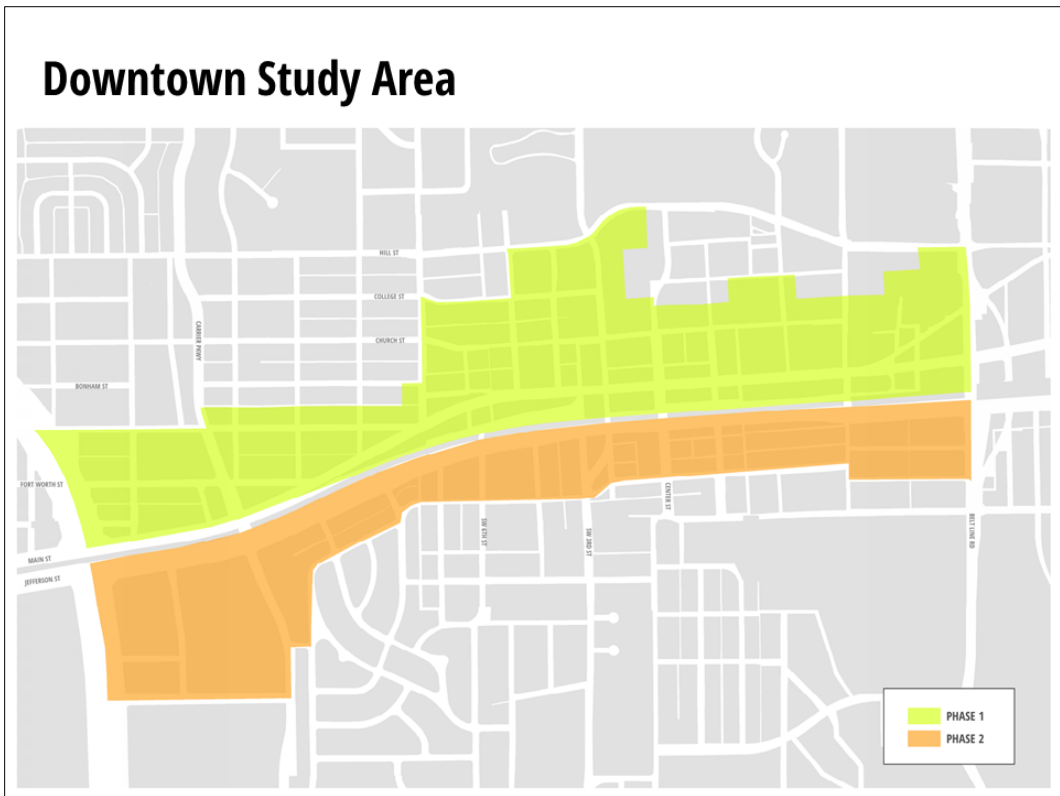
- Identify High Impact Actions
- Catalyze Local Investment
- Build Momentum & Excitement



Photo Source: Bonnie Meisels on Unsplash, Michael Kahn, Carmen K. Sisson/Cloudybright.



Photo Source: City of Grand Prairie.



Downtown Study Area



Downtown Investments





Photo Source: Carmen K. Sisson/Cloudybright.



Photo Source: Carmen K. Sisson/Cloudybright.



Photo Source: Carmen K. Sisson/Cloudybright.



Photo Source: Carmen K. Sisson/Cloudybright.

Downtown Vision



Strong Identity & Sense of Place



Great Public Spaces



Active Streetscape

Icons Source: LA Great Streets on The Noun Project.



Photo Source: D Magazine.

Strong Identity & Sense of Place

- Destination area with a healthy mix of restaurants, offices, services, and usable public space
- Functional & functioning design standards
- Branding & wayfinding
- Gateways to downtown
- Authentic Grand Prairie



Photo Source: Mac Glassford on Unsplash, Jazmin Quaynor on Unsplash, Jurien Huggins on Unsplash.



Photo Source: Rob Bye on Unsplash.

Great Public Spaces

- Programming
- Public art & murals
- Civic Center & Plaza
- Gathering places
- Placemaking



Photo Source: Tim Gouw on Unsplash, Katie Murray, Sara Brink on Unsplash.



Crosswalk Art Adds Color & Texture to a Street



Photo Source: Tanya Haines, Architecture Design, LASN, Uptown Dallas Inc.



Murals & Public Art Create an “Instagrammable” Downtown



Photo Source: Guide Live, Guide Live, @fashionveggie, Guide Live.



Photo Source: Visit Dallas.

Active Streetscape

- Walkable (safe + enjoyable)
- Sit-able
- Pedestrian scaled
- Interesting window displays
- Outdoor cafes



Photo Source: Tim Gouw on Unsplash, Rob Bye on Unsplash, Jurien Huggins on Unsplash.



Photo Source: J'Adore Dallas.



Photo Source: Suzette Wenger.



Photo Source: Near Southside Inc.

Revitalization Success

- Walkable
- Outside Dining
- Unique Restaurants
- Programmed Events

Revitalization Tools

- Design Standards
- Tax Increment Financing District
- Neighborhood Empowerment Zone
- Near Southside, Inc

Key Takeaways

- Public investment spurs private investment
- Implementation tools & organization get results



Photo Source: FortWorth.com, FortWorth.com, Fort Worth Magazine, FortWorth.com



Photo Source: City of Lewisville.

Revitalization Success

- Civic Center Anchor
- Wayne Ferguson Plaza
- Distinct Character
- Pedestrian Oriented Main Street

Revitalization Tools

- Development Standards
- Old Town Sign Ordinance
- Old Town Economic Incentives

Key Takeaways

- Civic Center synergy with Main Street
- Coordinated elements create a sense of place



Photo Source: Dennis Jansen, Dallas Observer.



Photo Source: Author.



Bishop Arts Dallas

Photo Source: The City Influencer.

Revitalization Success

Independent Restaurants & Businesses

Public Art

Vibrant Streetscape

Revitalization Tools

Conservation District

Reduced Parking Requirements

Key Takeaways

Reduced parking requirements served as an incentive

Small-scale private investment resulted in a unique neighborhood with a mix of independent restaurants & shops



Photo Source: BishopArtsDistrict.com, Antonio Rambles.



Photo Source: NACTO.

What is it?

An approach to neighborhood building using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyze long-term change

Tactics Include

- Build a Better Block
- Parking Day
- Pavement to Plazas
- Pop-Up Shops
- Open Streets
- Pop-Up Cafes



Photo Source: Trevor Dykstra, SPUR, Build a Better Block.

Why use it?

Low-risk + high-reward

Action-oriented

Tests new ideas

Observe and measure results

Adjust as conditions change

Experience rather than imagine

Engages stakeholders



Photo Source: Trevor Dykstra, Build a Better Block, Build a Better Block.

Reclaim Pavement



Photo Source: Ryan Russo with NYC TOD.



Photo Source: NACTO, SDOT, NACTO.

Make Streets Safer



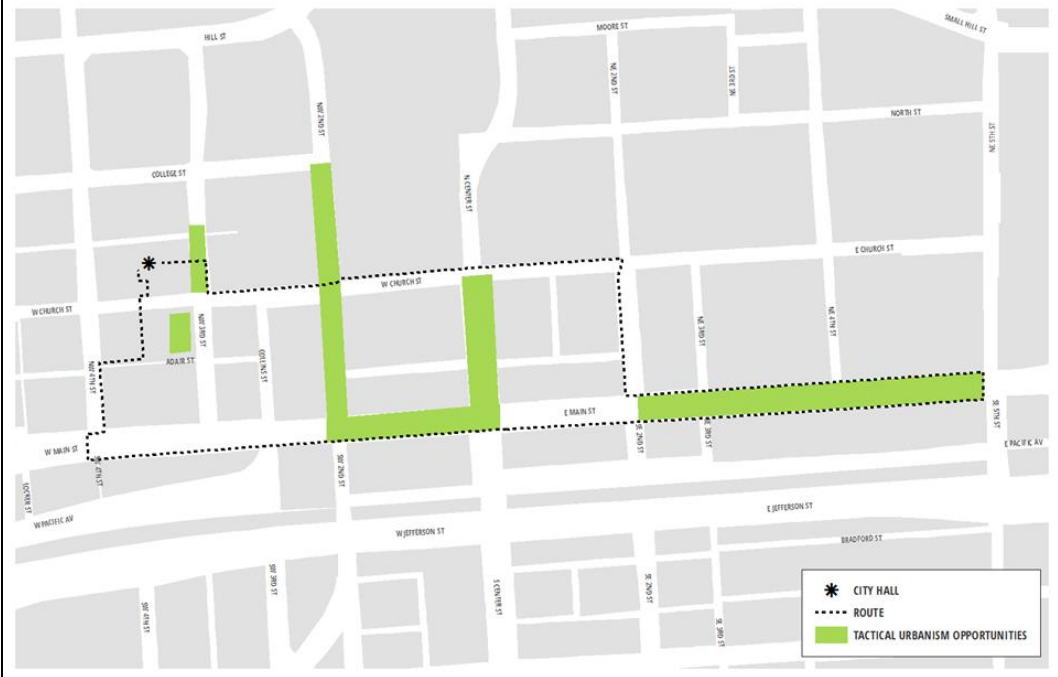
Photo Source: Farr Associates, City of Seattle, John Greenfield.

Activate Spaces



Photo Source: City Collaborative.

Task Force Walking Tour



Demonstration Project 1

Curb Extensions/Median on Center Street



Proposed Improvements

- Curb bulb outs shorten crossing distance
- High-visibility crosswalks are more visible to vehicles
- Median calms traffic and plantings improve aesthetics

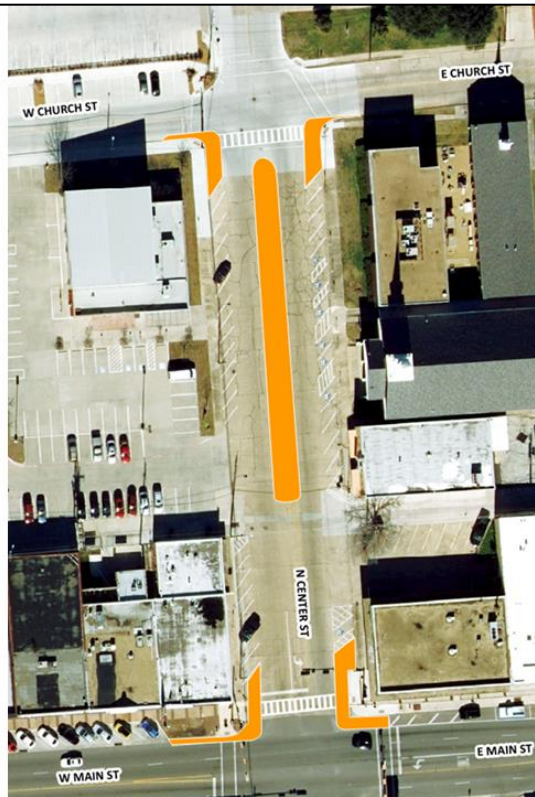


Photo Source: John Greenfield.

Demonstration Project 2

Temporary Civic Plaza

- Test out ideas & get people excited about things to come
- Observe how people use & collect feedback
- Builds user base for permanent plaza



Photo Source: NACTO.

Demonstration Project 3

Traffic Calming Along NW 2nd St

- Test out various forms of traffic calming like curb extensions, chicanes, and on-street parking
- Measure speeds before and after to see which works best



Photo Source: City of Seattle.

Next Steps



**Demonstration
Projects**



**Activation
Overlay**



**Update
Code**

Icons Source: LA Great Streets on The Noun Project, LA Great Streets on The Noun Project, Novita Hidayah on The Noun Project.

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