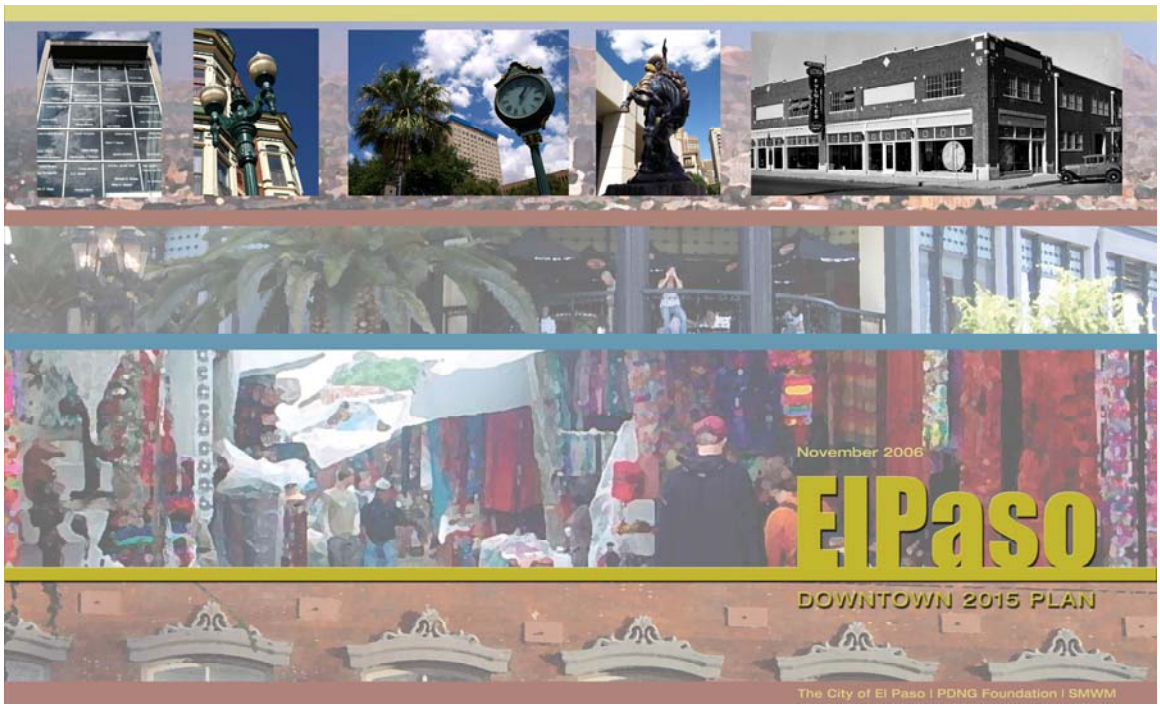
Implementation of the El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan: Phase Two

City of El Paso



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Executive Summary

The Phase II study is a refinement of the Downtown 2015 Plan and provides an implementation pathway to assist City Council, TIRZ Board, and city staff in successfully implementing the plan.

Chapter 2, Implementation Pathway, discusses the need for a cohesive management structure in downtown. In addition, a regulatory framework is provided in this chapter. The need to address linkages - pedestrian, vehicular and transit, thereby making it easier to negotiate the different parts of downtown, is addressed in Chapter 3. Building on the recommendations of the Downtown 2015 Plan for catalyst projects, Chapter 4 looks at emerging projects and recommends additional future project concepts. Chapter 5 provides 'order of magnitude' cost estimates for recommended streetscape projects. Based on the scope, impact, and level of public and private participation, this chapter provides the city and the TIRZ board decision making criteria for funding incentives for downtown redevelopment projects.

The balance of the report deals with financial and economic forecasts, updating the figures in the original plan, forecasting growth and suggesting scenarios for bond financing related to the Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone. As a whole, this report should give the involved parties direction they need to successfully implement the Downtown 2015 Plan, thus leading to the successful revitalization of the heart of El Paso.

Chapter 1 – Overview

In a resolution passed and approved on July 10, 2006, the City Council of the City of El Paso, Texas (the City) expressed its intent to create Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone Number Five, City of El Paso, Texas (the TIRZ) to enable the redevelopment of approximately 188.42 acres of land in the downtown area. This land is made up of five geographically distinct and contiguous redevelopment districts for commercial and residential uses (the Project). The implementation of the Project was initially based on the City's Downtown 2015 Plan prepared by the consulting firm SMWM and adopted by the City in October 2006. This implementation plan is augmented by City of El Paso Tax Increment Zone Number Five plan, prepared and adopted in December 2006, and the current document. This Phase II Report is intended to be a long-term framework. By establishing an implementation policy, the original Downtown 2015 Plan and this implementation guide can evolve and embrace changing conditions and new opportunities.

After decades of decline and failed revitalization efforts, there has been a recent renaissance in downtowns across the United States. According to a sample of 45 communities done by the Brookings Institution, the number of households living in the central city rose 13 percent from 1990 to 2000, a trend that undoubtedly has accelerated in recent years. A variety of factors have contributed to this resurgence, including:

- *Demographics*, specifically smaller household sizes;
- *Changes in the structure of the economy*, with a heightened emphasis on adding value through the provision of service and knowledge;
- *Shifts in consumer tastes and preferences*, including a greater acceptance of owner-occupied multi-family housing and a strong desire for "authenticity" and "experience";
- *Technology*, especially as it enables decentralized work and informs consumer tastes;
- *Transportation*, including congestion and rising energy costs, and
- *Cultural/entertainment*, an element of society that is increasingly multi-faceted and diverse.

Underlying all of the above (which influence all of society) is the desire for what has been termed *Walkable Urbanism.* According to Brookings, "since the rise of cities 8,000 years ago, humans have only wanted to walk about 1,500 feet (approximately a quarter mile) until they begin looking for an alternative means of transport: a horse, a trolley, a bicycle, a car. This distance translates into about 160 acres – about the size of a super mall, including its parking lot. It is also about the size, plus or minus 25 percent, of Lower Manhattan, downtown Albuquerque, the financial district of San Francisco, downtown Atlanta, and most other major downtowns in the country."

What makes walkable urbanism function is not merely distance, but the experience – a pedestrian trip where one encounters a mix of sights and sounds in the context of a range of land uses and a diverse built environment. The translation is that "critical mass" occurs when visitors can find enough to do for an afternoon or an evening, residents' daily needs are largely met within easy access, and the underlying economics justify ongoing investment. When this happens (and is sustained), a dynamic system is in place that will create enhanced economic and fiscal value.

Many of the trends outlined above are currently evident in El Paso. For example, the core of downtown El Paso fits the size criteria for walkability, and already contains a wide range of land uses, cultural activities, and architectural styles. Perhaps just as importantly, private sector investment in the central city has accelerated sharply in recent months, with a number of announced projects and more in the offing. This is a crucial element of successful revitalization, as evidence locally and elsewhere indicates that sustainable redevelopment typically requires both public participation, in the form of both infrastructure and policies/programs, and private commitments. This public/private partnership creates a sum that is greater than the parts, in the process offering the community the maximum return on its collective investment.

The balance of this report provides a roadmap toward implementation of the vision articulated in the El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan. The focus is on items directly within the purview of TIRZ #5, although it touches on other downtown issues as well. Chapter Two provides an implementation pathway, and Chapter Three outlines the potential linkages within downtown and between downtown and other El Paso activity centers. Chapter Four outlines the projects that are underway and proposed in the context of downtown development districts. Chapter Five provides guidance regarding public infrastructure cost estimates and provides a broad policy for funding improvements, Chapter Six updates the TIRZ Project and Finance plan, and Chapter Seven documents the economic impact of new development.

Exhibit 1: Linkages Map

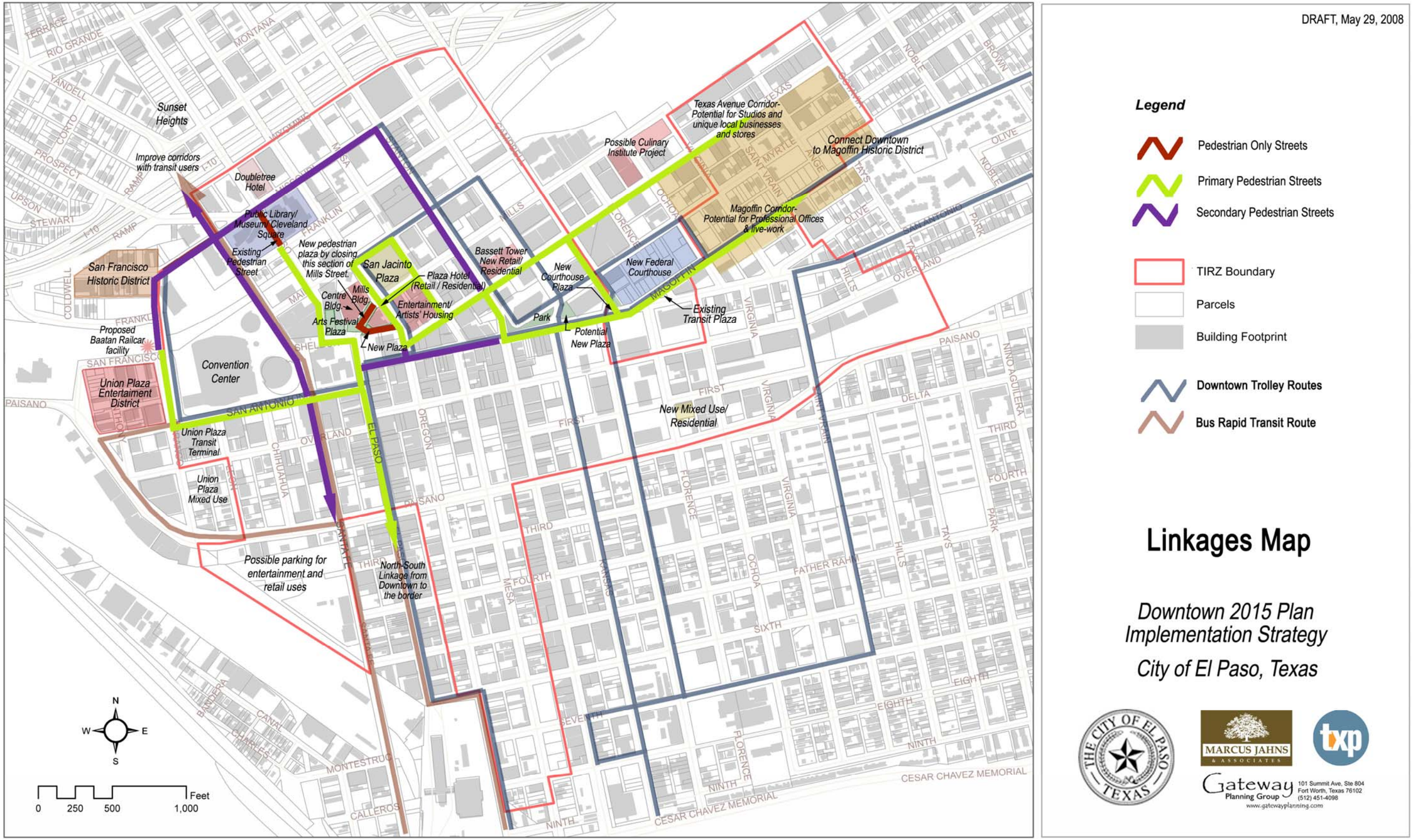
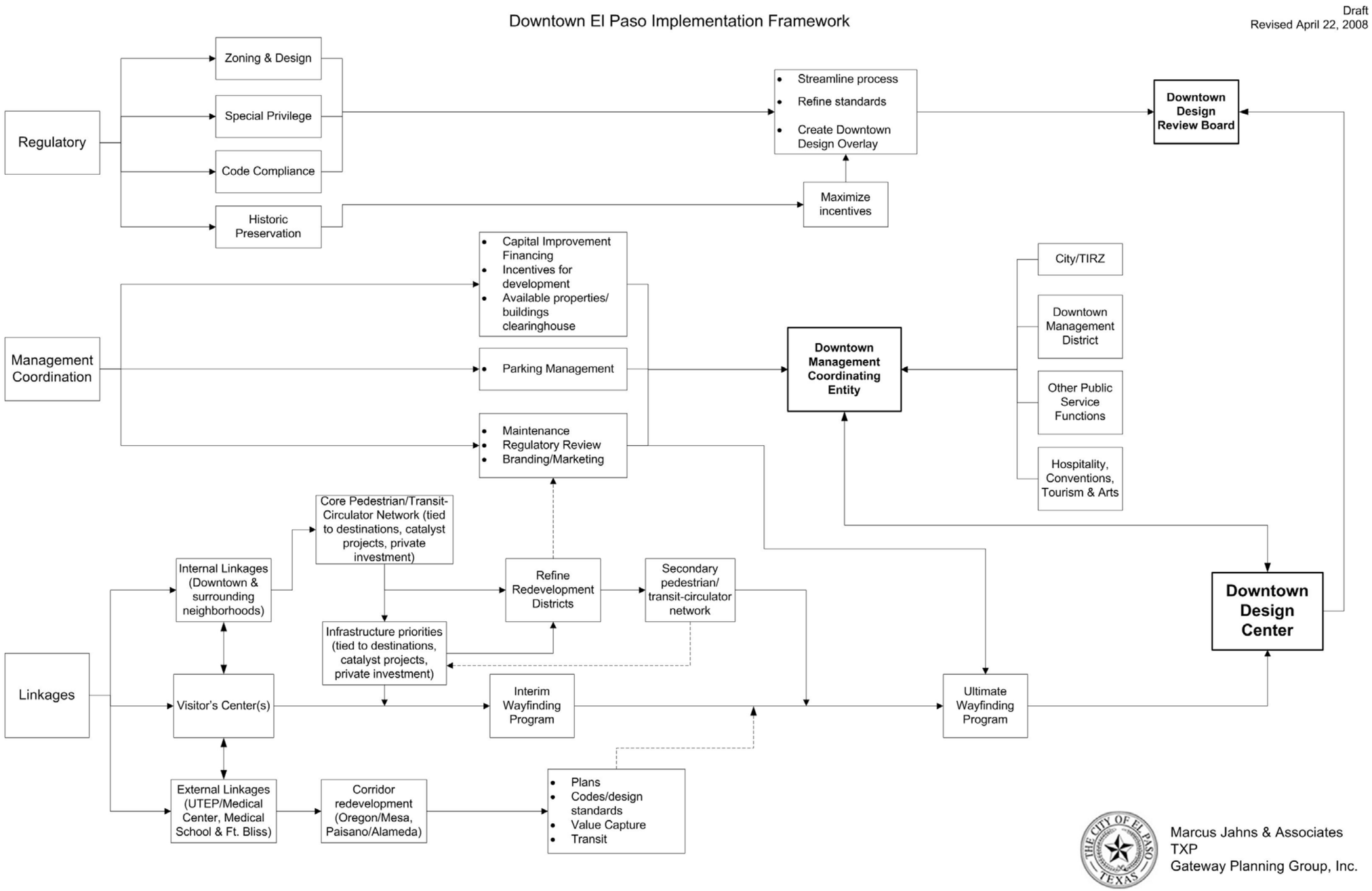


Exhibit 2: Downtown El Paso Implementation Framework



Chapter 2 – Implementation Pathway

Successfully implementing the Downtown Plan necessitates a management structure that is sustainable, adaptive and facilitative of public-private partnerships. As the pace of downtown redevelopment increases and matures, the structure for managing downtown will need to transition from ad hoc project-based approaches into a system of coordinated governance.

The City has recently introduced a coordinated project team to move redevelopment projects through the city process. That initiative is a good first step. However, much of the downtown management needs to be addressed on a long-term basis. Through early listening sessions during this phase of the Downtown Plan, the current piecemeal approach to downtown management became apparent. For example, multiple entities currently claim some respective responsibility for trash collection, parking management, maintenance and code enforcement. A lack of a coherent and consistent structure led several stakeholders to comment that downtown management capacity is fundamentally lacking. In this context, maintaining redevelopment momentum will become challenging and difficult.

Downtown management is fundamentally about customer service. Business owners, art patrons, residents, potential investors, visitors, tourists, hoteliers and shoppers are all looking for convenience, safety and urbanity in their downtown experience. Achieving consistency in these outcomes requires a system of downtown governance that is grounded in expectation and predictability. Expectation and predictability flows from coordination across all areas of responsibility and the availability of tools and resources for every aspect of downtown management. Whether a “no cigarette butt” tolerance for trash, or a contemporaneous capacity to identify available properties for investment; downtown’s success will be measured by its management responsiveness. Appendix 2 provides a comparison chart of downtown management structures of selected comparison cities in the nation.

The Downtown Plan is quickly moving from visioning to implementation. The Mills Plaza District Project, for example, offers the complexity of opportunity that necessitates the marriage of capital infrastructure design, public space management, ongoing phased investment, shared parking, retail management, pedestrian linkages and the leveraging of multiple destination programming. In this context, a framework is proposed for downtown management.

1. A New Framework

The proposed *Downtown El Paso Implementation Framework* sets forth a three-part structure: “Regulatory,” “Management Coordination” and “Linkages.” (See Downtown El Paso Implementation Pathway- Exhibit 2). As the exhibit demonstrates, these three areas are connected both substantively and structurally.

2. Management Coordination

In terms of structure, the “Management Coordination” track fundamentally assumes the implementation of a Downtown Management Coordinating Entity. This entity could be an existing institution, a new special district or a non-profit corporation. Regardless, this entity would serve as the central management institution, both in terms of programmatic needs such as parking and maintenance, and in terms of governance needs such as implementing the TIRZ capital program. The Downtown Management District function, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Arts and Historic Preservation entities as well as basic city services departments would all be represented through this central entity. The main goal is for functional streamlining and any organizational change should be firmly based on stakeholder input and the local context of El Paso.

This entity could functionally coordinate three key areas of responsibility that would tie different relevant institutions, stakeholders and programs together in various appropriate configurations:

a) Development—this area would focus on the TIRZ capital program, development and design review, parking, housing, real estate information, the arts, etc.
b) Public Services—Downtown Management/PID functions such as maintenance, landscaping, security, as well as Code Enforcement and Planning support
c) Events—this area would provide support for festivals, special events, marketing, sponsorships, etc.

3. Design Matters

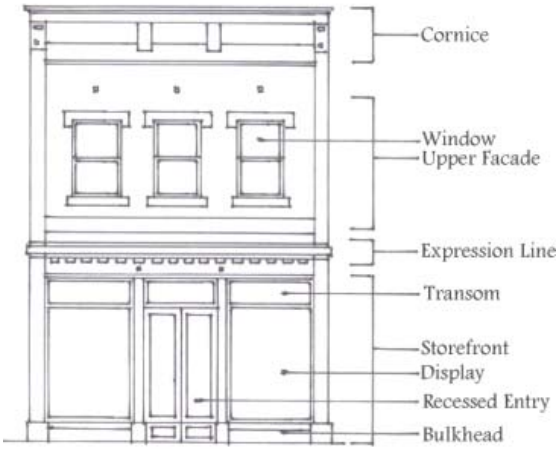
Central coordination of these traditional functions is critical; but coordination alone will not suffice in terms of raising the character and quality of the downtown experience. The recent focus on the arts and historic preservation underscores the need for a means to manage and support the design aspects of downtown. Design takes many forms in downtown: the urban design of the public spaces, the architectural design of buildings, and the aesthetic design of the important details of the urban experience such as signs, street furniture and public art. Accordingly, two new institutions should be considered.

A Downtown Design Center could provide support for existing institutional needs such as implementing the Downtown Historic District. At the same time, it could provide guidance and creative input for the implementation of needed streetscape infrastructure, signage, and landscaping elements for the linkages and improvements needed to connect the various emerging districts of downtown.

At the same time, the Design Center could provide staff support for a Downtown Design Review Board, which is one of many recommendations in terms of regulatory reform.

4. Regulatory

The second track for the *Downtown El Paso Implementation Framework* is Regulatory. Fundamentally, streamlining has been identified as a critical outcome for implementation. Streamlining without substantive changes will not result in sustained quality implementation of the Downtown Plan.



On the front end, functional changes in the code of ordinances will be needed in terms of a form-based or more performance-based zoning environment. In other words, an even more flexible use environment, complemented with a prescribed urban design environment, will provide a more market-sensitive context for mixed use redevelopment. Such reforms in the zoning environment must be coordinated with other key ordinance factors such as special privilege considerations, code compliance and historic preservation.

This approach will also enable historic preservation to be elevated through a combination of additional guidelines and standards, complemented with an incentive-prioritized system for public-capital investment. For example, key historic buildings can be targeted for a higher level of incentive support if the applicants take advantage of a more aggressive preservation strategy, especially if combined with a preferred outcome such as substantial provision of affordable residential units as a program component.

Ultimately, design standards for all aspects of urban design and architecture should be implemented and required to elevate the level of redevelopment over time. In

order to manage this process effectively, a Downtown Design Review Board should be instituted with a membership of design experts appointed to consider the granting of Certificates of Appropriateness on the basis of sufficient design before projects can proceed. The proposed Downtown Design Center could provide staff to support the functions of the Downtown Design Review Board. All of the relationships of the Design Center, the Design Review Board and the Downtown Management Coordinating Entity are delineated in the *Downtown El Paso Implementation Framework.*

5. Linkages

Ultimately design is fleeting if it is not functional. Accordingly, the development of a comprehensive Linkages Program is provided in the next chapter. As indicated in the *Downtown El Paso Implementation Framework,* the Linkages Program is both physical and temporal.

The physical aspects of the program literally link together destinations within downtown and destinations outside of downtown. These linkages are comprised of both pedestrian and transit enhancements of key streets and corridors. All of these destinations and linkages are then tied together via a system of Wayfinding. Wayfinding refers to the need to point visitors in the direction of Downtown destinations and acts as a means of effective access in and out of Downtown.

The Wayfinding Program is temporal in that, while a near-term Wayfinding Program is described and proposed in the next chapter, an ultimate Wayfinding Program must be deferred until a full-fledged pedestrian and transit system is in place that links a substantial number of districts and destinations. This process will ultimately be driven iteratively through incremental infrastructure investments prioritized through the system of linkages and market considerations. As the *Downtown El Paso Implementation Framework* indicates the evolution of the emergent districts, infrastructure priorities and pedestrian linkages will feed the maturation of the Wayfinding Program and ultimately the marketing and branding of downtown.

Chapter 3 – Linkages

The El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan identifies several key strategies to link existing and future destinations and districts within and around Downtown. This chapter builds on the recommendations of the Downtown Plan to provide the City strategic action items to work towards realizing the vision established in the Plan. In addition, several emerging catalyst projects are creating synergies around which the City needs immediate recommendations for linkages – vehicular, pedestrian, and transit. Traffic circulation within Downtown and to adjoining neighborhoods should be closely considered when catalyst projects are reviewed. Specifically, on-street parking, access, and retail friendliness are all critical to livable traffic patterns within Downtown. The emerging Catalyst Project Corridor will thus be activated by both internal and external linkages (see Linkages Map).

The recommended linkages are based on proposed projects and as such should be evaluated periodically. The goal of public sector investment in the form of linkages should be to follow private development projects. As new projects are announced, new opportunities to link these activities to existing destinations should be prioritized.

Streetscape improvements, public art and wayfinding are all critical elements that can greatly enhance linkages – pedestrian and vehicular. Streetscape improvements and public art are discussed under Pedestrian Linkages, while this chapter ends with a discussion of wayfinding strategies. Wayfinding is a critical element that will not only enhance the revised linkages plan but will also tie existing and emerging destinations within downtown and to the region.

1. Vehicular Linkages and Traffic Circulation

Downtown streets in the United States have undergone major transitions in the last century. At the turn of the 20th Century, downtown streets were focused on being retailing streets. As downtowns became the centers for regional employment and use of the automobile increased as the preferred mode of transportation, one-way streets became the norm to improve capacity and reduce traffic congestion within downtowns in the 1950's and 60's. As downtowns went through the cycle of disinvestment and reinvestment over the last few decades, the role of traffic circulation in downtown streets is being evaluated nationwide.

Streets within downtowns should balance the need for circulating traffic while promoting other significant goals for downtowns. These other goals include retail friendliness with on-street parking and two-way access, pedestrian orientation, safety, and streets as the premier public places of a city. Providing efficient traffic circulation is no longer the most important goal for downtown streets. Rather, a busy or somewhat congested street is an indicator of a healthy business

environment and adds to the vibrancy of downtowns. Increasingly, cities around the country are converting one-way streets to two-way streets in order to implement these higher goals for downtown streets.

With continuing increases in downtown development activity and recent recommendations for transition of street character, an evolving strategy for transportation analysis is recommended. Traffic circulation and parking are critical elements of implementing successful catalyst projects. To that end, evaluating on-street parking, structured parking, two-way conversions, and other public improvements should depend on the impact and scope of each development project proposed. Specifically, the criteria for such a project-based transportation evaluation should:

- Provide the best land use benefit for properties by maximizing the use of the public realm (street);
- Promote the concept of streets as destinations (great streets);
- Provide safe and efficient transportation for all modes, including vehicles, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users;
- Provide safe and efficient access to a range of parking opportunities – on-street and off street;
- Provide adequate access to emergency and service vehicles;
- Provide effective ingress and egress to events and destinations, and
- Balance overall vehicular level of service and network operations with pedestrian access and retail friendliness by evaluating the conversion of key one-way streets to two-way streets.

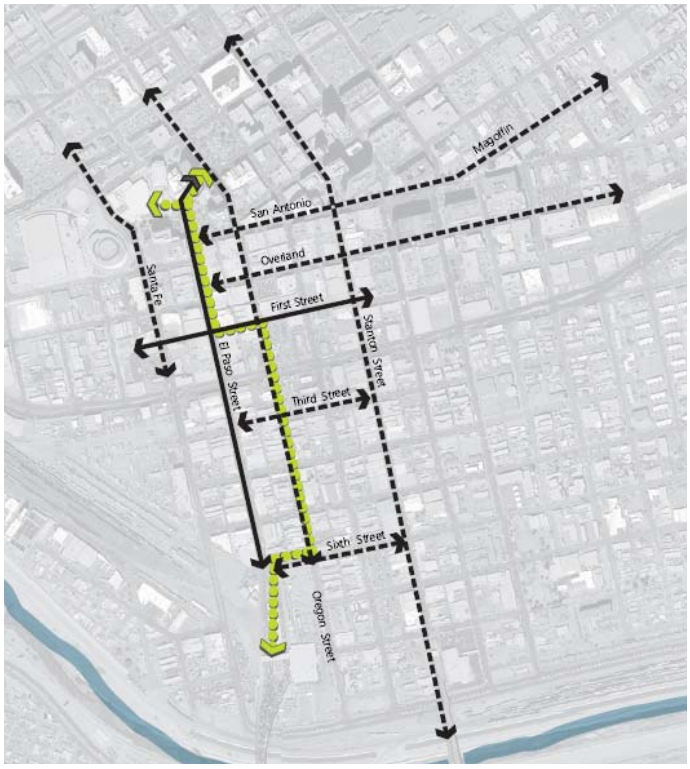
2. Pedestrian and Transit Linkages

In order to support the catalyst project corridor and improve connectivity between these projects within downtown, recommendations are set forth below for pedestrian and transit improvements.

i. Pedestrian Linkages & Streetscape improvements

The Downtown 2015 Plan established three distinct categories of pedestrian improvements in the form of Standard, Secondary, and Special Pedestrian Streets. Figure 3.1 shows the distribution of these streets and Table 3.1 summarizes the common features and differences between the three categories of streets recommended in the 2015 Plan.

Figure 3.1 – El Paso 2015 Downtown Plan Pedestrian Network



(Source: El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan)

Table 3.1 – El Paso 2015 Downtown Plan Pedestrian Street Recommendations

Item	*Standard Pedestrian Street*	*Secondary Pedestrian Street*	*Special Pedestrian Street*
Streets	Minimum standard for all downtown streets	• Third • Sixth • Stanton • Overland • Magoffin • San Antonio • Oregon • Santa Fe	• First • El Paso
Sidewalk Amenities	• Min. of 10' sidewalk width • Preferred 12' – 15' • Standard light fixtures • Street trees at 30' – 40' on center • Tree grates • Trash cans • On-street parking	• Min. of 15' sidewalk width • Standard light fixtures • Street trees at 30' – 40' on center • Tree grates • Trash cans • On-street parking • Paving variations • Banners • Benches • Bike racks • Banners • Sidewalk cafes and vendors	• Wider sidewalks • Corner curb extensions • Street trees at 30' – 40' on center • Tree grates • Trash cans • On-street parking • Unique street lighting • Specialty paving • Public art • Sitting areas • Hanging flower baskets • Kiosks • Banners • Sidewalk cafes and vendors • Enhanced landscaping

(Source: El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan)

The Special Pedestrian Streets were recommended based upon the catalyst projects recommended in the original 2015 Plan. The First Street improvements and extension to El Paso were a result of the Life Style retail development recommended along that corridor. Since other projects are moving forward at this time, this section recommends a revised pedestrian linkages plan based on the location of those other projects (see Linkages Map Exhibit 1).

Revised Pedestrian Linkages Plan

Based on the catalyst projects moving forward, this section outlines the critical pedestrian linkages required within downtown to take advantage of emerging project synergies. Investment in streetscape improvements should occur in conjunction with projects as they come on line. This revised linkages plan classifies streets as "Pedestrian Only" Streets, "Primary Pedestrian" Streets, and "Secondary Pedestrian" Streets; while retaining that all downtown streets, at a minimum, are "Standard Pedestrian" Streets (see Exhibit 1, Linkages Map).

Examples of successful Pedestrian Only Streets in Boulder, CO and Burlington, VT.

The Pedestrian Only Street category would address the general design criteria for the pedestrian plaza to be created from the closure of Mills Street and Sheldon Court to vehicular traffic from El Paso to Oregon as a result of the Mills Plaza redevelopment project. Pedestrian Only Streets would have the highest level of streetscape amenities and would be fully integrated with adjoining land uses, street furniture, landscaping, and public art.

Primary Pedestrian Streets are intended to connect the core destinations within the Downtown Area such as the Convention Center to Mills Plaza/San Jacinto Plaza and to the Government Center and Magoffin Neighborhoods to the east. In addition, primary pedestrian linkages would also connect the core to the El Paso Street retail corridor and the US/Mexico border to the south. These streets would have a fairly high level of pedestrian amenities while conveying vehicular traffic. Improvements to the Primary Pedestrian Streets would occur as development and redevelopment occurs along the identified corridors in a public-private partnership approach.

Examples of Successful Primary Pedestrian Streets

Secondary Pedestrian Streets are intended to provide connectivity along downtown transit corridors and to adjoining neighborhoods. These streets would have fewer pedestrian amenities, but will have comfortable sidewalks and street trees.

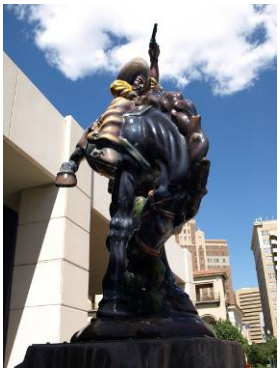
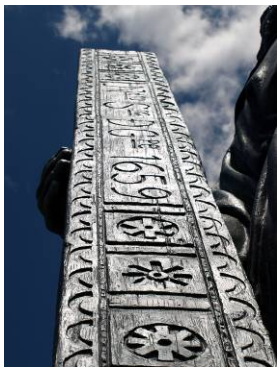
Examples of Secondary Pedestrian Streets

Table 3.2 establishes the streetscape standards by street categories identified – "Pedestrian Only", "Primary", "Secondary, or "Standard". These streetscape standards establish an optimal level of improvements based on the function of the street. However, they are generally intended to be flexible to accommodate a variety of existing conditions. Streetscape elements may be changed and adapted so long as the goal of pedestrian orientation is met. The rough estimates of cost for pedestrian improvements set forth in this table are delineated in Chapter 5.

Table 3.2: Revised Pedestrian Streetscape Recommendations

	Pedestrian Only Street	***Primary Pedestrian Street***	***Secondary Pedestrian Street***	***Standard Pedestrian Street***
Streets	• Mills Street from Oregon to El Paso • Sheldon Ct. from El Paso to Oregon • El Paso Street from Missouri to Franklin	San Antonio west of El Paso El Paso Street Texas Street San Antonio / Magoffin	Missouri Durango Santa Fe Stanton	All downtown streets

	Pedestrian Only Street	***Primary Pedestrian Street***	***Secondary Pedestrian Street***	***Standard Pedestrian Street***
	(existing)	Streets around San Jacinto Plaza		
Amenities	No vehicular traffic Street trees at 30' on center Tree grates Trash cans Unique street lighting Specialty paving Public art Sitting areas Hanging flower baskets Kiosks Banners Sidewalk cafes and vendors Bike racks Enhanced landscaping Wayfinding signs Enhanced landscaping	Minimum 20' sidewalk width Street trees at 40' on center Tree grates Trash cans Standard Street lights Street light banners Bike racks Specialty paving at intersections and key areas Wayfinding signage Newspaper corrals Benches Sidewalk cafes and vendors On-street parking	Minimum 15' sidewalk width Street trees at 40' on center Tree grates Trash cans Standard Street lights Street light banners Bike racks Wayfinding signage Newspaper corrals Benches On-street parking	Minimum 10' sidewalk width Preferred 12' – 15' Standard light fixtures Street trees at 30' – 40' on center Tree grates Trash cans On-street parking

Images and icons from Downtown El Paso that create the palette for streetscape improvements

Public Art

The recommendations from the El Paso Committee for Public/Private Arts Advocacy recognize that the Creative Sector can be a critical partner in downtown redevelopment. To this end, a Public Art Program should be developed to harness the strengths of the local art community. Such an art program would establish an overarching framework for the involvement of local artists in the design of several streetscape amenities. Amenities such as bike racks, bus shelters, benches, and kiosks could all be designed and installed by local artists for a nominal fee. Experience in other communities has shown these programs promote art and the use of the public space by pedestrians and bicyclists. For example, in Louisville, KY, the bike rack art program has resulted in increased exposure to artists, increased art commissions, increased bicycle ridership within downtown and

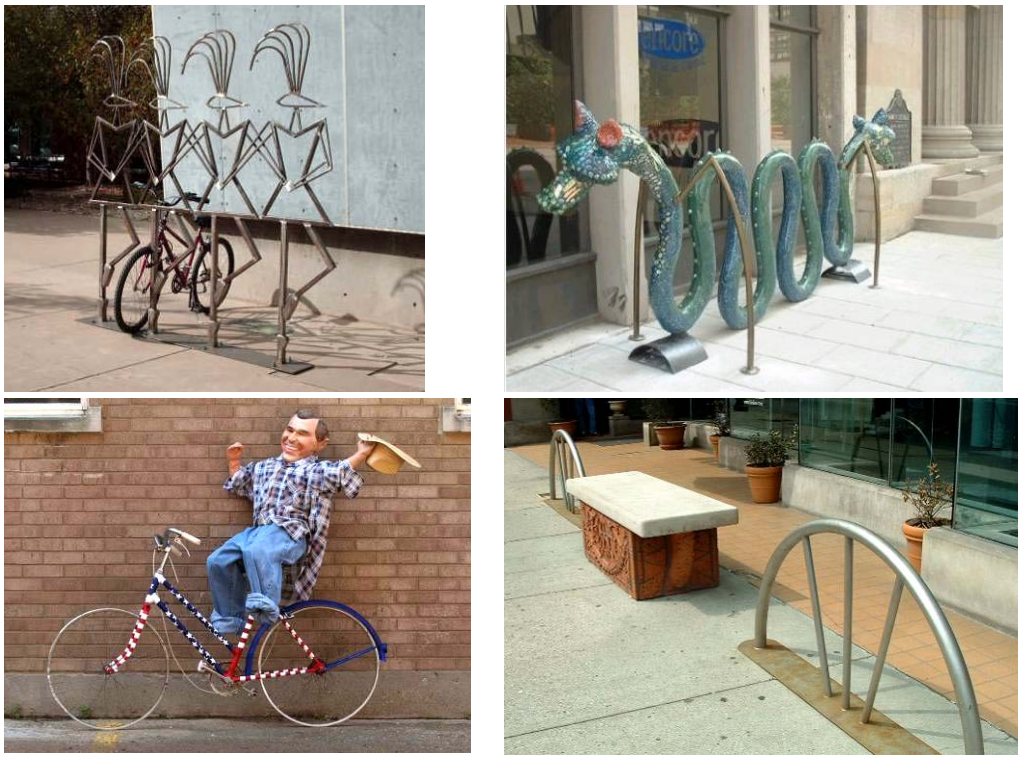
fostered a student bike art program. In addition, it has become publicly popular thus creating greater appreciation for public art.

Implementation of a Public Art Program

A Public Art Program is recommended to better coordinate the different art-related initiatives and to help develop a cohesive framework for public arts along the different pedestrian linkages corridors. This program could be developed with the City-wide Public Art Program in cooperation with the El Paso Committee for Public/Private Arts Advocacy. Major outcomes for such a program would include:

- Engagement of the public art community;
- Public art improvements that create unique themes along corridors and destination/neighborhood identity as part of each corridor's streetscape plan and an overall wayfinding plan for downtown;
- Increased awareness, interest, and public art education; and
- On-going platform for public artists to be coordinated and connected to the community.

Successfully implemented art programs can lead to event and festival outcomes such as art studio tours. In addition, such tours could be linked with transit connectivity such as gallery connector trolleys.



Examples of Bike Rack Public Art in Louisville, KY
(Source: Louisville Downtown Management District)

ii. Transit Linkages

Sun Metro, the City's transit agency, is currently undertaking two projects that would improve connectivity within downtown via the downtown circulator trolley and connectivity between downtown and major local and regional destinations such as the UTEP campus and the Texas Tech Medical School via the Bus Rapid Transit initiative. The Bus Rapid Transit initiative is discussed in the next section of this chapter dealing with external linkages to adjoining neighborhoods and downtown.

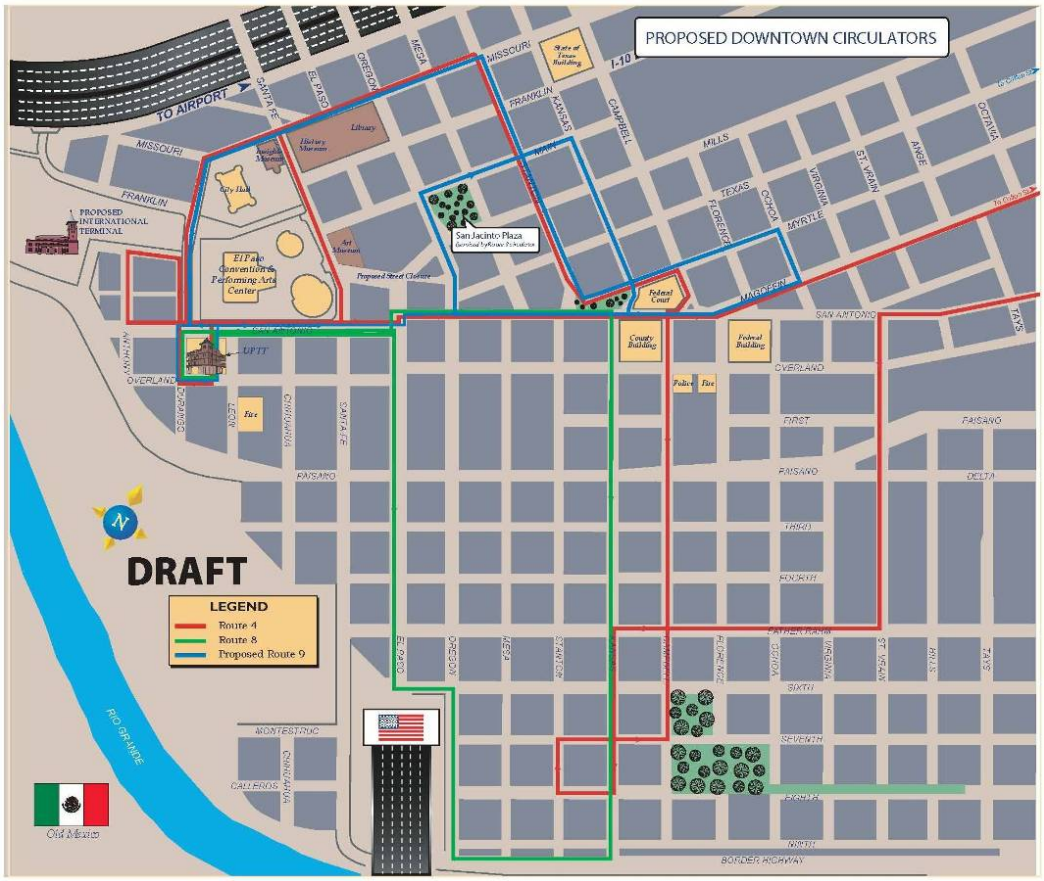
The goal of this section is to recommend improvements in the public realm that support the Sun Metro's initiatives such as the Downtown Trolley Circulator and BRT routes. Specifically, in addition to pedestrian improvements, streetscape improvements that focus on linking wayfinding and public art with transit amenities such as bus shelters, bicycle racks, transit signage, should be a priority along all transit corridors.

Downtown Circulator Routes

Sun Metro is revising the downtown circulator routes in order to serve the existing and emerging downtown destinations. In an effort to revitalize San Jacinto Plaza as the pedestrian heart of Downtown El Paso, Sun Metro is moving all transit transfer operations to the new Union Plaza Transit Terminal on San Antonio Street. The Downtown Circulator trolley, however, will still provide access to San Jacinto Plaza. The proposed circulator routes will connect the different areas of downtown and adjoining neighborhoods to downtown destinations.

San Antonio Street is the major east-west connector and El Paso, Kansas, and Campbell Streets provide north-south connectivity. Streetscape improvements along these corridors should emphasize them as transit corridors by providing adequate seating, shade, and bicycle parking at identified transit stop locations in addition to wayfinding to destinations at each stop location. These streets should ultimately become Secondary Pedestrian Streets. Figure 3.2 shows the proposed downtown circulator routes.

Figure 3.2 – Proposed Downtown Circulator Routes



(Source: Sun Metro)

<u>Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Initiative</u>

External linkages from downtown to adjoining neighborhoods and regional destinations are critical to support the revitalization of downtown as the metropolitan area's true center. These linkages should be in the form of pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and automobile connectivity. Pedestrian linkages have been discussed under the Internal Linkages section. Critical pedestrian and transit linkages to adjoining neighborhoods (Magoffin, San Francisco, and Sunset Heights) and the US/Mexico border are identified in the Linkages Map. External automobile linkages should be evaluated as part of project based transportation analysis recommended earlier in this Chapter. With respect to transit, Sun Metro is currently undertaking a Bus Rapid Transit initiative.

Sun Metro's BRT initiative is intended to link downtown El Paso to destinations such as University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP)/Hospital District and Texas Tech medical school. Phase 1 of the BRT line will connect Downtown to UTEP via Oregon Street (see Figure 3.3 for draft BRT alignment).

Roadway corridors within downtown identified for the BRT line are Santa Fe (southbound) and El Paso (northbound). In addition, San Antonio is identified as an east-west connector. Given the prominent nature of San Antonio as both a Primary Pedestrian Street and a transit corridor, it should be a high priority street for streetscape improvements. Other transit corridors should, at a minimum, be improved as “Secondary Pedestrian Streets” with transit shelters, bike racks, seating, and landscaping.

Another strategy to create synergies between development and transit is to undertake a branding initiative for the City’s BRT service lines. The City of Boulder, CO created distinct identities and brands for 5 of its major transit routes called HOP, SKIP, JUMP, LEAP and BOUND. Such a system has created new excitement and interest in transit and has made riding buses fun and easy.

BRT initiatives are an opportunity for redevelopment along these underutilized corridors with focus on the creation of new residential neighborhoods and retail/mixed use nodes. Such a transit-oriented corridor plan should leverage the transit investment and its link to downtown and other destinations by identifying development opportunities along the corridor.

Redevelopment of these BRT corridors would not only increase transit ridership, but would also strengthen downtown’s role as the region’s center. The City should undertake an economic development approach to creating opportunities for reinvestment through combined land use, urban design, zoning, and economic development policy frameworks along these BRT Corridors

Figure 3.3 – Draft BRT Phase 1 Alignment

(Source: Sun Metro)

3. Wayfinding Strategy

"Wayfinding" is the critical third element of the revised Linkages Plan. Easy access to information about locations (places), destinations, parking, and types of goods and services within the downtown area increases the value and sociability of downtown to residents and visitors alike. Wayfinding is typically thought of as just signage. However, wayfinding within downtown or a region can be achieved through a consistent streetscape, public art, branding, and signage. A good wayfinding program would integrate all these aspects of the built environment to provide users with visual cues and information about the place they are in.

A wayfinding program need not be an "all" or "nothing" strategy. It can be appropriately phased in and layered as downtown destinations and districts mature and take on new identities. Downtown El Paso has an immediate need for a vehicular wayfinding program that directs people to existing destinations and parking locations. The following is a list of existing destinations/districts that would benefit from an interim wayfinding program:

- Convention Center district and parking
- Union Plaza Transit Terminal
- City Hall/Library
- Federal Courthouse and adjoining government uses
- San Jacinto Plaza
- Existing museums
- El Paso Street retail district
- Adjoining historic districts (Magoffin, San Francisco, and Chihuahuita)

Emerging destinations such as the Mills Plaza project, Union Plaza entertainment, Magoffin Corridor redevelopment, and others identified in the Linkages map (Exhibit 1) would also benefit from this interim strategy. A near-term strategy is to identify critical automobile decision points at major entry ways into downtown and direct drivers to major destinations/districts (trailblazer signs) and then direct drivers to parking locations (both public and private).

Auto-oriented Wayfinding Signage in Oklahoma City, OK, and Atlanta, GA.

Over the long-term though, a layered approach to wayfinding is recommended. With several catalyst projects underway, Downtown El Paso's districts are being formed. These catalyst projects are setting the stage for a larger definition of the development districts and their image/branding.

In addition, the City is also undertaking a Heritage Tourism Plan which should be an element of the long-term wayfinding plan. The ultimate wayfinding program would then be developed incrementally as these new destinations and districts mature and take on new identities. This ultimate wayfinding system would not only seamlessly integrate vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian wayfinding with public art and streetscape improvements but also incorporate Heritage Tourism destinations for downtown and the region.

Wayfinding Signage in Center City Philadelphia which incorporates both vehicular and pedestrian-oriented signage

Downtown District logos in Louisville reinforce The districts' identities and character.

Pedestrian Kiosks in Downtown Louisville that incorporated public art and signage, thus "branding" the City's downtown and development districts.

Chapter 4 – Catalyst Projects

The El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan envisioned catalyst projects in each of the five Downtown Redevelopment Districts. Subsequent to the Plan's adoption, a number of significant redevelopment projects in the Downtown area have been announced. In December 2007 the City Council amended the boundary of the TIRZ to include portions of the Historic Incentive District, i.e., roughly 100 additional acres.

This chapter provides an overview of redevelopment activity in each of the original redevelopment districts, describes the new catalyst projects that have been announced and are in some phase of development, and identifies concepts for other projects for possible implementation in the future. Additionally, this chapter provides the City and the TIRZ Board a basis for a broad project prioritization policy. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

1. Downtown 2015 Plan Overview and Development Districts

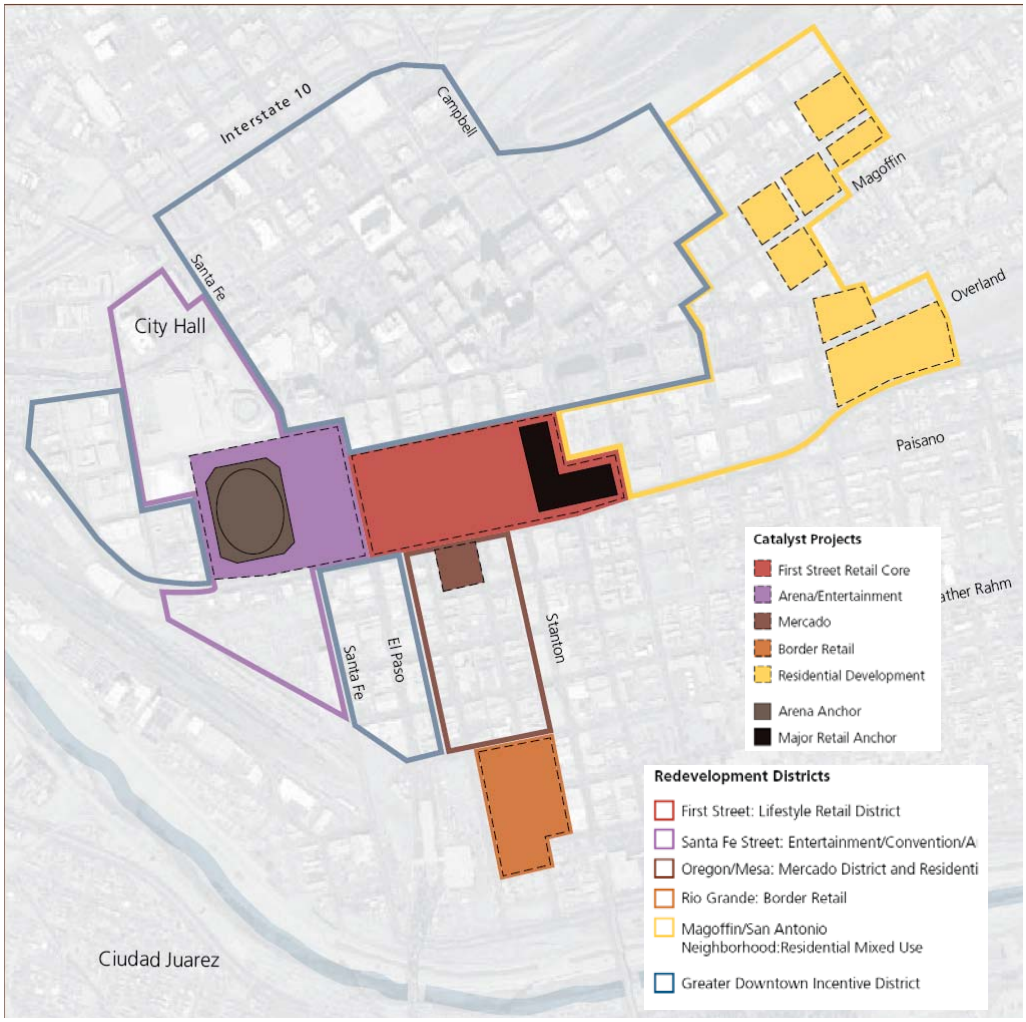
The El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan categorized development opportunities into 5 distinct development districts (see Figure 4.1) with different goals and characteristics. In addition, specific project concepts were recommended within each development district to strengthen its identity. The following is an overview of the recommendations of the 2015 Plan as they relate to the Development Districts and the corresponding catalyst projects.

Lifestyle Retail District

The Lifestyle Retail District adjacent to First Street was envisioned to create an opportunity for pedestrian-oriented retail in an area targeted for upscale and unique stores that may include thematic retail clusters. The preliminary catalyst project included the construction of 600,000 square feet of retail space. An anchor retail facility on First Street was identified as the first catalyst project.

No catalyst projects have emerged in the Lifestyle Retail District at this time. As the market for lifestyle retail in downtown emerges, such a development would be feasible. In addition, conversions of existing buildings could accommodate retail storefronts, offices, and restaurant uses.

Figure 4.1. El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan Redevelopment Districts and Catalyst Project Locations



(Source: El Paso Downtown 2015 Plan)

Public investment in this district would include the pedestrian streetscape improvements along El Paso Street as a “Primary Pedestrian Street” connecting the downtown core to the El Paso Street retail and the border. Primary uses in this district should continue to be retail activity and supportive uses.

Santa Fe Street Convention/Entertainment/Arena District

The 2015 Plan envisioned a major entertainment area along Santa Fe Street. Plans for this redevelopment district include a new Downtown arena and arena hotel. The arena would become a hub for hosting sporting events, trade shows, conventions and other entertainment programs.

An arena hotel was envisioned as the principal catalyst project for the redevelopment district. A total of 510 new hotel rooms are expected to come online over the next 10 years. Projects announced and underway suggest that three separate hotels (200 rooms, 200 rooms and 110 rooms) will open over the next several years. This new capacity should help improve overall market performance, as these hotels will fill a niche that is under-served locally. New demand in the near-term for Downtown lodging should come from increased business travelers attributable to growth in office uses as well as leisure travel, driven in part, by growth in entertainment and heritage tourism. For a more in-depth discussion of the hotel demand please refer to Chapter 6.

The former International Hotel Downtown located in the Historic Incentive District and now in the TIRZ, is now gutted through its 17 floors. Reconstruction of the hotel began this year. The building is being turned into a 200-room Hilton Double Tree Hotel. It is expected to open early next year.

In addition, a cineplex multi-screen movie theater and draft house catalyst project discussed below is a candidate for location in the Convention / Entertainment / Arena District.

Mercado Retail District

A colorful arts-inspired Mercado was envisioned as the catalyst project for this redevelopment district. The Mercado would serve as an attraction for local artisans and retailers to an area designed for shopping, strolling, dining and attendance at cultural events. Local retail is planned to increase by 200,000 square feet and will include produce, arts, crafts and ethnic markets. A new plaza, park and arts walk were also envisioned to contribute to the revitalization of this redevelopment district. No catalyst projects have emerged in the Mercado Retail District.

Public investment in this district would include the pedestrian streetscape improvements (including public art and wayfinding) which would be enhanced by the pedestrian streetscape improvements in the adjacent streets including El Paso Street as a “Primary Pedestrian Street” connecting the downtown core to the El Paso Street retail and the border. In addition, with respect to the Mercado Retail District code enforcement will be a critical element for its success as a vibrant and sustainable retail district. Special attention to signage, awnings, paint, and general upkeep of retail storefronts is a high priority for storefronts in this district. Primary uses in this district should continue to be retail activity and supportive uses.

Border Retail District

The Border Retail District was envisioned to serve as the anchor to the "Golden Horseshoe" shopping area and provide an additional 300,000 square feet of retail space adjacent to the Mexican Border. Additional parking was also envisioned in this district.

No catalyst projects have emerged in the Border Retail District. Public investment in this district would include the pedestrian streetscape improvements (including public art and wayfinding) which would be enhanced by the pedestrian streetscape improvements in the adjacent streets including El Paso Street as a "Primary Pedestrian Street" connecting the downtown core to the El Paso Street retail and the border. In addition, code enforcement will also be a critical element of the downtown management strategy within this district.

Residential Mixed-Use District

The 2015 Plan envisioned the construction of a mixed-use urban neighborhood in the Magoffin Area with an estimated total of between 700 and 1,400 new residential units and 195,000 square feet of retail space. The catalyst project(s) for this redevelopment was to be 400 units of housing to address the immediate need for affordable and market rate Downtown housing.

Future catalyst projects and proposed streetscape improvements strengthen this district as a residential/mixed use area. Specifically, the Magoffin Area is suitable for Live-Work and professional office uses and adjoining blocks of different types of residential uses. In addition, the El Paso Committee for Public/Private Arts Advocacy in its report entitled El Paso: Hot Places, Cool Spaces: Developing Recommendations for the Integration of the Creative Sector in Downtown Revitalization; identified "the Downtown/Magoffin Neighborhood, certain blocks of Texas Avenue, and Union Plaza" for mixed use residential and live-work development.

Accordingly, the Magoffin corridor has been identified as a "Primary Pedestrian Street" with streetscape improvements as a high priority. These improvements and the improvements along San Antonio would connect the Magoffin neighborhood to the downtown historic core and the entertainment district to the west.

The Florence Street Project discussed in more detail below, which is in this District, has been identified as a catalyst project which will generate additional activity and generate economic demand.

Historic Incentive District

City Council on December 18, 2007 amended the TIRZ Boundary to include portions of the Historic Incentive District into the TIRZ. Funds generated from the original five Redevelopment Districts may not be used for projects within the new TIRZ area, however funds from the Historic Incentive District may be used anywhere within the TIRZ.

The most significant economic activity throughout the TIRZ is occurring in the Historic Incentive District as evidenced primarily by the Mills Plaza District Project and others discussed below.

2. Announced/Emerging Projects

Since the adoption of the Downtown 2015 Plan, several projects have been announced or are emerging. These projects together with potential projects identified in Section 3 of this Chapter form a "Corridor of Catalyst Projects" that stretches from the eastern edge of Downtown in the Magoffin Historic District westward, along a corridor framed by Texas Avenue and San Antonio Street through the core of Downtown past San Jacinto Plaza and though the Entertainment District westward to Union Plaza.

Given this potential "Corridor of Catalyst Projects", the opportunity to connect the various Downtown catalyst projects together with pedestrian linkages is tremendous. This section describes a variety of projects that are already in some phase of development within Downtown (see Exhibit 1 – Linkages Map for locations of various projects).

These projects are presented in order of earliest to latest initiation date and are not presented geographically. It should be noted that few of the projects are located within the five original redevelopment districts. Those with the most significant economic impact are within the Historic Incentive District.
Table 4.1 provides a summary of projects underway.

Table 4.1. Summary of Projects Underway and Announced in Downtown El Paso

PROJECT	USE	DISTRICT	LOCATION	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	OTHER
Double Tree Hotel (Private)	Hotel	HID (TIRZ)	El Paso, Missouri, Wyoming	200 Room full service hotel.	• 1st major hotel project downtown in years. • Visible from I-10. • 3 blocks from Convention Center. • Public incentives provided • Adjacent to Main Public Library, new Museum of History, and Cleveland Square Park
Mills Plaza District (Private)	Mixed-use ground floor retail, office, hotel/housing, parking garage	HID (TIRZ)	Mills at Oregon, Main, Franklin. Mills at Sheldon	Renovation of 3 historic buildings – Mills and Centre Buildings and Plaza Hotel Mix of office space, retail space, restaurants, 2 parking garages & meeting facilities	• Evaluation of traffic circulation in the vicinity • In conjunction with the public improvements to the adjacent pedestrian plaza and San Jacinto Plaza. • Renovation of historic buildings.
Mills Plaza District (Public)	Public Plaza (“Pedestrian only street”)	HID (TIRZ)	Mills between El Paso and Oregon	Conversion of vehicular street to a pedestrian plaza with streetscape amenities and active outdoor uses such as cafes, seating, etc.	• Requires vacation of streets to vehicular traffic • Evaluation of traffic circulation in the vicinity • In conjunction with the renovation of the Mills and Centre/White House Buildings and Plaza Hotel.
San Jacinto Plaza (Public)	Public Park and adjoining Streetscape improvements	HID (TIRZ)	Blocks bounded by Oregon, Main, Mesa, and Mills Streets	Redesign of the Plaza to be a true heart of Downtown with the transfer of Sun Metro operations away from the Plaza	• High priority project • Will provide project synergies together with the Mills Plaza pedestrian street improvements
New Federal Courthouse (Public)	Federal Courthouse	HID (Non-TIRZ)	East of Campbell between Magoffin, Myrtle, 2 blocks south from Texas Ave.	9 story building, 239,400 square feet of gross Courthouse space	• Connects Downtown Core with Residential / Mixed-Use District. • Provides opportunity for revitalization along the Magoffin corridor for professional office and live-work development
Florence Street Housing (Private)	Residential Mixed-Use	Residential/ Mixed-Use District (TIRZ)	S Florence at First Ave.	11,000 sq. ft. residential lofts, 6,500 sq. ft. office and retail space	• Secure tenant parking & rooftop terrace.

(Source: City of El Paso)

Double Tree Hotel

The Double Tree Hilton Hotel is a private sector redevelopment project of the former International Hotel located Downtown in the Historic Incentive District of the TIRZ. It is located on El Paso Street between Wyoming and Missouri Streets. The hotel is adjacent to the main library and new Museum of History located at the refurbished Cleveland Square Park. The project will provide 200 additional hotel rooms with a full array of guest services and is expected to open in 2009.

New Federal Courthouse

The new Federal Courthouse now under construction in Downtown El Paso is expected to be completed by May 2009. The Courthouse is being constructed at the eastern end of the Central Business District on a 2.3-acre site located between Magoffin and Myrtle streets, immediately east of Campbell. It is located within the Historic Incentive District but outside of the TIRZ and provides a compatible land use transition between the core of Downtown and the Residential / Mixed-Use District and creates an opportunity to foster revitalization of an in-town neighborhood. This nine-story building will provide 239,400 gross square feet and allow court functions to move from the outdated 1936 courthouse across the street.

Mills Plaza District Project

Located within the Historic Incentive District, the Mills Plaza District Project consists of the rehabilitation of three adjacent buildings along both sides of Mills Street including: the Anson Mills Building, the Centre Building and the Plaza Hotel. The owners of the three buildings are committed to restoring them to their original stature and glory as historic landmarks. The private sector project is already underway and joins the development of office space with restaurant and retail space with the intention of restoring the original historic and design aspects of

renowned architect Henry Trost who designed all three buildings as well as a number of other Downtown buildings including the adjacent Plaza Theater.

The City is considering the vacation of vehicular traffic from Mills Street to provide for a pedestrian-only public plaza between the buildings. In addition, this would provide the opportunity for outdoor cafes and new public open space for multiple purposes and events. This street vacation of vehicular traffic and creation of the public plaza would constitute a portion of the public participation of what is to be a public-private partnership project.

The 12 story Mills Building, once the tallest concrete building in the nation as well as once being the tallest building in El Paso, and the Centre Building which once housed the White House Department Store will be rehabilitated to provide for a ground level shopping promenade with coffee shops, book stores and high end retail. The basement of the building will be used for art galleries and tenant storage. The upper floors will be converted to office space with state-of-the-art technology for business uses. The second floor of the Mills Building overlooking the renovated San Jacinto Plaza will be reserved for a world-class restaurant.

Plans for the 19-story Plaza Hotel have not been finalized but the building could be reconfigured as a boutique hotel, a residential building with lofts and/or apartments, office space or a combination of the three as well as provide ground floor retail opportunities.

The City of El Paso, working with Sun Metro, has plans to shift the city-wide bus transfer function from San Jacinto Plaza to the Union Plaza Transit Terminal. The City has plans to redevelop the Plaza into more appealing, pedestrian friendly open space where people can gather for various purposes such as entertainment, literary events and artistic presentations.

The project also provides for two parking garages, one around the back of the Mills Building, the Centre Building and the Plaza Theater and the other on a current surface lot at

San Antonio & El Paso Streets. The developers have plans to complete a 700 to 1,000 space parking garage named after the long-gone St. Regis Hotel on whose site the first garage will be built. The plans also call for the construction of 5,000 to 7,000 person meeting room on the top floor of the parking garage.

The creation of the pedestrian plaza ("Pedestrian Only Street") between the buildings and the redesign and development of San Jacinto Plaza are high priority public sector projects that should be considered for TIRZ funding.

Florence Street Housing / Mixed Use Project

The Florence Street Mixed Used Project is located at South Florence Street and First Avenue and is located within the Residential Mixed Use District. Although not actually under construction the developer has initiated the development process and has applied for rezoning of the property to allow for construction of a mixed-use project.

The mixed-use project will consist of approximately 11,000 square feet of residential loft and approximately 6,500 square feet of retail and office lease space. The project will provide a green rooftop terrace and secure parking for residents and tenants. Public participation on this project could be in the form of streetscape and sidewalk infrastructure, at a minimum, to be developed as a "Standard Pedestrian Street".

3. Future Project Concepts

The following are projects what have been identified or proposed and are in some phase of planning / conceptualization but are not under development.

Texas Avenue Corridor Redevelopment Opportunities

Texas Avenue is a critical east-west connector linking the Magoffin neighborhood to downtown. Historically, Texas Avenue was home to large floor plate buildings that housed the City's auto dealerships. The auto dealerships are long gone, but the buildings and their unique architecture provide great opportunities for redevelopment into a true mixed use corridor. Buildings on Texas Avenue have tremendous potential to be redeveloped for artists' studios, lofts, and unique boutique businesses and stores. It is already home to art galleries, studios, El Paso Chile Company, and other local businesses. With the possible redevelopment of the Bassett Tower into residential uses, Texas Avenue is poised to become a true arts and cultural corridor.

This corridor also offers significant opportunities for a range of affordable and market-rate residential development. With potential for adaptive reuse, upper floor lofts, live-work units, artists' studios, and new construction on vacant properties, it can provide a wide array of residential development prospects for downtown living.

In order to provide incentives for redevelopment along this corridor, the City could potentially redevelop its Records Storage building and associated parking lot located on Texas Avenue at Ochoa. One of the concepts for this location is the development of a Culinary Institute with the participation of local businesses and institutions such as the El Paso Chile Company, El Paso Community College, University of Texas at El Paso, and local wineries. Such a facility could include a farmers' market, a culinary business incubator, food court, and other related uses.

Historic image of the City's Records Storage building when it was a Ford Car Dealership

Texas Avenue has been identified as a Primary Pedestrian Street to be improved as redevelopment occurs along the street (see Exhibit A – Linkages Map).

Magoffin Area Residential / Mixed-Use Opportunities

The Downtown 2015 Plan envisions the construction of a mixed-use neighborhood in the Magoffin Area with an estimated total of between 700 and 1,400 residential units and 195,000 square feet of retail space. The immediate catalyst project for this redevelopment was to be 400 units of affordable and market rate housing.

The El Paso Committee for Public/Private Arts Advocacy in its report entitled El Paso: Hot Places, Cool Spaces: Developing Recommendations for the Integration of the Creative Sector in Downtown Revitalization has also identified "the Magoffin Neighborhood and certain blocks of Texas Avenue for mixed use residential spaces". The Committee goes on to state "the Corridor is an in-town neighborhood with publicly owned historic assets, existing arts organizations and a strong connection to Downtown". The combination of City owned properties, a

warehouse arts district, the dimensions and character of the buildings, and its proximity to Downtown make this area an excellent candidate for a work / live environment for creative conceptual thinking.

The consultants preparing the El Paso Heritage Tourism Plan have also noted that “a revitalized close-in neighborhood will increase much needed residential development in Downtown and would provide new opportunities to showcase the [historic] Magoffin House” through ‘shopkeeper’ development on vacant land owned by the State and restoration of historic homes”.

Downtown Housing Opportunities

Downtown housing, both affordable and market-rate, is a critical success factor in revitalizing downtown El Paso. It has been identified as a priority in the Downtown 2015 Plan and should be a major focus in implementing this plan. Various districts within Downtown and adjoining blocks offer opportunities for residential development. To this end, this report tries to identify several opportunities for housing. In addition, it identifies public-private partnership opportunities to encourage the development of both market-rate and affordable housing.

Images showing a variety of housing opportunities within downtowns from adaptive reuse to new construction.