

# CITY OF ROUND ROCK



## DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

# PROJECT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## CITY OF ROUND ROCK

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*The Downtown Master Plan recognizes the inevitability of growth and the imperative to get ahead of that growth and influence it rather than react to it and regret.*





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mission Statement

The goal of this Master Plan is to create a design and policy strategy for a thriving town center featuring a viable mix of retail, dining, entertainment, residential and public spaces, in a walkable and historically-sensitive environment to enhance our sense of place, economy and quality of life.

The Master Plan Area

The Master Plan area includes all of historic downtown Round Rock, from Interstate 35 on the west, the Union Pacific railway line on the south, and Brushy Creek on the north and east. A portion of the site also extends north of the creek along Mays Street to just north of Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79).

Process

From Fall 2008 to Spring 2009, the design team undertook an iterative community visioning process to create the Master Plan. Community members participated in a public design charrette, which was an intensive series of meetings, design working sessions, round tables, and presentations, to gather feedback and conceptualize the future of downtown. The feedback was consolidated and refined into the Master Plan.

Goals

The primary goal of the Master Plan is to describe how Round Rock can create a bustling town center beyond its two-block historic area, which features a viable mix of uses in a walkable environment, in order to enhance the community’s economy, quality of life, and sense of place.

The visions articulated in this Plan should be solidified through the implementation of a future Form Based Code. Visions and policy recommendations presented here can be synthesized and spliced into the future Code, which would include design guidelines, use regulations, and standards for building form and placement within the downtown area. The Code would encourage quality development that is compatible with the Master Plan’s urbane and pedestrian-friendly vision for downtown, which includes ground floor retail, mixed-uses, and activated public spaces.

The Plan aims to:

- Accentuate the area’s assets and build upon past planning efforts
- Present a cohesive vision and identity for the area
- Describe place-making concepts to achieve an activated and attractive downtown
- Provide strategies to implement the urban design concepts
- Stimulate responsible and foresighted growth in downtown

How to Use the Plan

This Plan can be used as a development guide for downtown, informing decisions about building styles, locations, uses, and forms that are compatible with the vision articulated by the community. The Plan can also be used to understand what sorts of policy changes should be pursued to encourage appropriate development patterns and what public works projects are prioritized.

Planning Principles

The planning principles emphasized include:

- Community-based design for contextually-appropriate planning
- Human-scale urban design
- Walkability and transit-orientation
- Respect for historic architecture and the urban block network
- Responsibility to the environment
- Emphasis on enduring design and quality materials
- Innovation to uncover new programs, policies, and designs

The Vision

The primary strategies of the Plan include:

- Defining a series of walkable streets and neighborhoods that are hierarchically differentiated one from the other through streetscaping, building form, and program
- Viewing the street as an outdoor room
- Preserving the Main Street historic area and extending the downtown building fabric in terms of scale and architecture
- Traffic calming / balancing all modes of travel
- Identifying and programming a series of greens / public spaces
- Incorporating sustainable urban design

Key Opportunities and Constraints

Downtown Round Rock has a tight and walkable street grid with a significant number of historical buildings. Lot sizes are small and the Main Street retail area is compact and built out. Together these characteristics make the area attractive for redevelopment and infill development that is pedestrian-oriented and “small town” in character. The location of downtown along the Interstate and adjacency to a rail line offer other opportunities for the study area. Both Brushy Creek and Lake Creek are other amenities that should be capitalized upon. Interstate 35, Mays, and Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) are currently barriers to development since they are wide, noisy, and hard for pedestrians and bicycles to cross, but at the same time they bring a lot of people to the area. Round Rock’s position as the “Sports Capital of Texas” is another opportunity for downtown as its future is visualized.

Key Implementation and Strategies

Chapter 3 presents a multi-pronged implementation framework of recommendations that includes:

Identification of Seven "Catalytic Projects."

These projects are critical to the success of downtown Round Rock and have the potential to activate key areas with dynamic designs and uses. The catalytic site areas include:

- New Main Street bridge
- New town green
- Main Street historic core streetscaping
- Mays streetscaping
- Round Rock Avenue streetscaping
- Georgetown streetscaping
- Heritage Trail

Development/Implementation of a Form Based Code

This Master Plan lays a strong foundation of visions, design guidelines, and policy recommendations that can later be refined and integrated into the city’s regulatory framework through a Form Based Code. The Code will be the tool through which the vision for downtown, articulated by the City Council, will be achieved.

Recommendation of Policy Initiatives

New policy recommendations include:

- Adaptive reuse and historic preservation
- Parking reform
- Public financing mechanisms
- Retail development tools and leasing strategies
- Vacant lots and infill
- Quality-of-life performance standards
- Incentives for green building
- Re-platting

A Design Guide

A design guide is presented in Chapter 4 for urban design and architecture to guide developers, architects, and residents through standards that ensure development in downtown Round Rock is consistent with the goals presented in the Master Plan.

Organization of the document

The Master Plan is arranged with analyses of existing conditions presented first, followed by Plan visions and concepts, and then more detailed policies, implementation strategies, and studies.

The Introduction, Chapter 1, situates the Plan amongst existing documents, describes the visioning process, and presents background planning analysis for the Plan area.

Chapter 2, the Master Vision Plan, presents the vision statement and Master Plan and then goes on to describe the Plan in detail, including its open space and circulation components, historic preservation concepts, economic plan, and sustainability concepts.

Chapter 3, Implementation Policies and Strategies, describes the catalytic site areas, the options for adopting a Form Based Code, and the policy initiatives recommended for downtown.

Chapter 4 presents the design guide with both urban design and architectural guidelines for development. The Chapter provides the basis for a future Form-Based Code.





# INTRODUCTION

## Project Description







# INTRODUCTION

Downtown Round Rock has the potential to become a thriving area drawing locals and visitors to shop, eat, work, visit, recreate, people-watch, and stroll; it has both the “bones” (the walkable street grid, the historic buildings) and the drive (the people, the activities, the ideas). The Master Plan puts forth a vision for an activated downtown Round Rock, consolidating community input, city goals, and planning expertise into a series of physical design concepts, social and community-oriented use-based strategies, policies, and implementation systems.

The primary goal of the Master Plan is to describe how Downtown Round Rock can become a thriving town center featuring a viable mix of residential, commercial, retail, dining, entertainment and public space uses in a walkable and historically-sensitive environment to enhance Round Rock’s economy, quality of life, and sense of place.

The pedestrian-oriented style of development supported by this Master Plan is part of a push by forward-thinking municipalities around the nation to rethink their “street spaces” and their public realm. For the past century, street design has been geared towards the automobile. Design regulations have prioritized uniformity and speed over character and livability, leaving pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users competing for the residual space. With this Master Plan, the City of Round Rock acknowledges the potential of good urban design to improve not only the physical appearance of the community, but also the health of our residents, the environment, the strength of our social connections, and critically, our economy.

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment explains that good urban design adds economic value to an economy by: producing higher returns on investment; producing local competitive advantages; raising prestige; responding to demand of local businesses; providing benefits to local workers (through productivity gains and the like); and reducing management, maintenance, energy, and security costs.

Suburban type development typically performs well financially in the short term because development costs are oftentimes less than that for urban downtown redevelopment, with anticipated peak performance in the first five to ten years. Investment in the suburban areas is also more cyclical as sprawl continues to push demand in to further outlying areas. Conversely, downtown redevelopment can typically achieve higher returns in the long term due to higher quality construction and investment in the early years. Moreover, studies show that suburban development is often subsidized due to the cost of extending roads and other infrastructure improvements and providing new services in the outlying regions.

Cities that have invested in their public realm and encouraged urban-style redevelopment are seeing improved property values and increased retail sales. For instance, typical suburban property values are \$5-15 per square foot while mixed-use urban values are \$25-30 per square foot. Appropriately-placed pedestrian zones in city centers boosted foot traffic by 20-40% and retail sales by 10-25% in the UK. A nationwide study in the US reported a property value increase of 30% after new traffic

calming measures were installed. In New York, apartment prices near community gardens and green spaces are 7% higher than comparable apartments in the same neighborhood. Since the City of Mountain View, California widened and enhanced its main downtown street by improving sidewalks, removing parking spaces, and planting trees, the street has drawn \$150 million in private investment in residential and office units and has become a regional attraction. This Plan lays out a vision for economic viability based on smart growth and sensitive urban design.

- The Plan aims to:
- Accentuate the area’s assets and build upon past planning efforts
  - Present a cohesive vision and identity for the area
  - Describe place-making concepts to achieve an activated and attractive downtown
  - Provide strategies to implement the urban design concepts
  - Stimulate responsible and foresighted growth in downtown

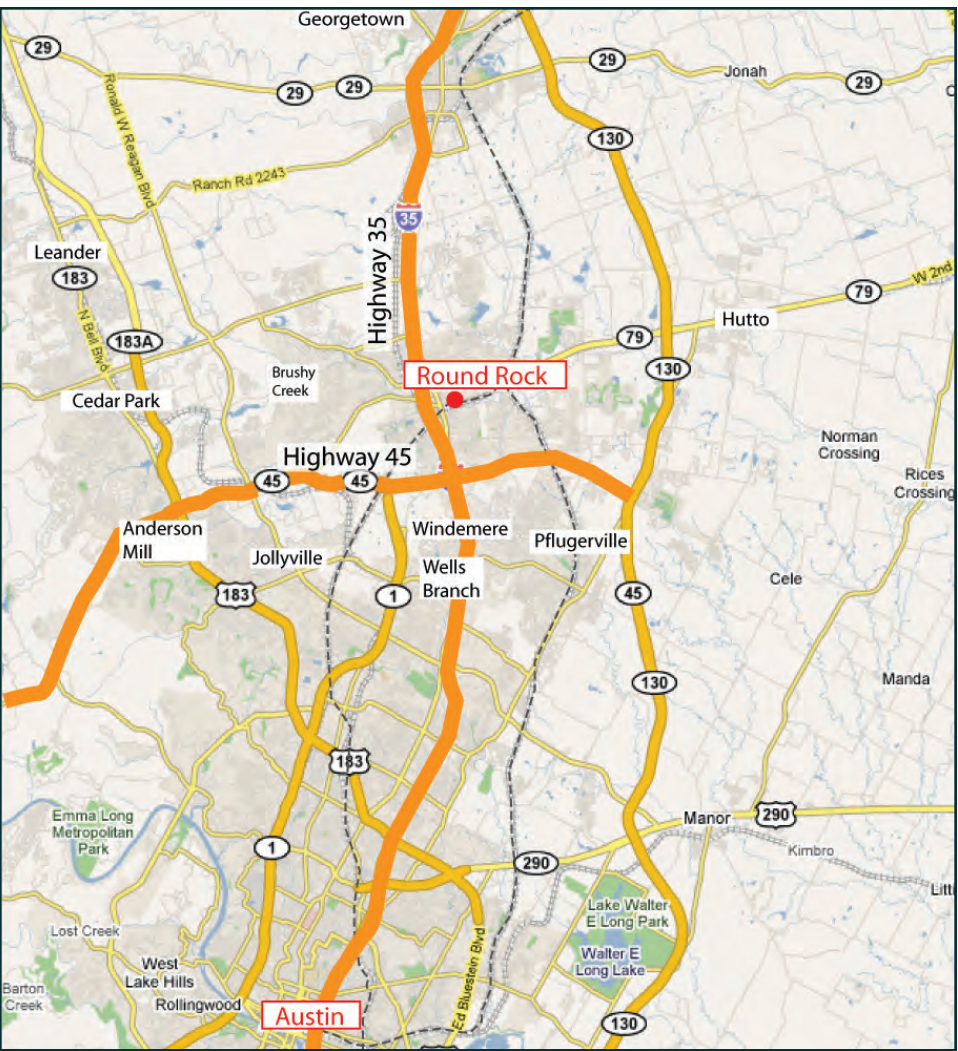
- The planning principles emphasized include:
- Community-based design for contextually-appropriate planning
  - Human-scale urban design
  - Walkability and transit-orientation
  - Respect for historic architecture and the urban block network
  - Responsibility to the environment
  - Emphasis on enduring design and quality materials
  - Innovation to uncover new programs, policies, and designs

- The primary strategies of the Plan include:
- Defining a series of walkable streets and neighborhoods that are hierarchically differentiated from each other through streetscaping, building form, and program
  - The street as an outdoor room
  - Preserving and extending Round Rock’s historic district and building fabric in terms of scale and architecture
  - Traffic calming / balancing all modes of travel
  - Identifying and programming a series of greens / public spaces
  - Incorporating sustainable urban design and building strategies

## Locating the Site

The study area for the Downtown Master Plan is bounded by Interstate 35 on the west, the Union Pacific railway line on the south, and Brushy Creek on the north and east, although a portion of the site extends north of the Creek along Mays Street to just north of Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79).

The site’s significant location attributes include its proximity to several regional sports facilities, including the Round Rock ISD Athletics Complex (9 miles) and the Dell Diamond and the Old Settlers Park baseball complex (3 miles). Round Rock brands itself as the Sports Capital of Texas for its tourism program. Other significant location attributes include the area’s proximity to Interstate 35 (immediately adjacent), Dell’s Round Rock campus (2 miles), and downtown Austin (15 miles).



The regional map shows downtown Round Rock and its location along Interstate 35, 15 miles north of downtown Austin.

*"The Urban Land Institute projects that mixed-use and infill development and neighborhood retail centers will be favored in the next round of retail development. This will put downtown Round Rock in a good position moving forward in terms of mixed-use development within the downtown core."*



"An Eye Toward the Future"

For several years, urban life has been making a strong resurgence. People are turning to previously neglected downtowns and town centers as sources of nightlife, civic activity, workspace, and shopping. Auto-oriented development is more unpopular while pedestrian-oriented and multi-modal patterns of growth are growing in prevalence. The preservation of historic districts is coupled with a search for new sustainable growth strategies. This Downtown Plan for Round Rock is positioned amongst these national trends. The Plan is based on the community's increasing belief in the potential downtown has to blossom along with the community's recognition of the inevitability of growth and the imperative to get ahead of that growth.

Building on What Has Come Before

The Master Plan (2010) is the result of an intensive community design process (Winter 2008), a walkability study (June 2007), a City Council Retreat (August 2007), a series of focus groups, interviews, public meetings and surveys (November 2007), a series of city tours by the City Council to learn first-hand about redevelopment and a Southwest Downtown Plan (2005). Together these activities helped frame and guide the Master Plan process.

Policy Framework

The City's General Plan (2000) and the Downtown Neighborhood Plan (1994, reviewed 2002) are the two policy documents that guide growth in the study area. The Neighborhood Plan provides a set of recommendations aimed at improving property values, assuring that new development is sensitive to existing development, and promoting the positive aspects of the neighborhood. The Plan focuses on business promotion, code enforcement, street clean-up and maintenance, landscaping, sidewalk improvement, lighting installation, increase of park space, public safety programs, and parking and circulation improvements.

Visioning Meetings

The 140 participants in the November (2007) visioning meetings included residents, business and property owners, elected officials, community representatives, developers, and other stakeholders. The community identified the area's assets on which the Master Plan should capitalize, such as the two-block historic core on Main Street, the unique architectural quality of many historic buildings, Brushy Creek, the walkability of the urban street grid, and the small-town feel of the area. Constraints such as the barrier presented by Mays Street, perceptions of parking shortages, insufficient infrastructure, speeding traffic, and too few restaurants, businesses, and other downtown attractions, were also identified during the meetings.

City Council Retreat

During the City Council Retreat, the Mayor and Council members visited Silicon Valley, the Denver Metroplex, and Scottsdale, Arizona to get ideas about how Round Rock should grow and what role the Council should take in supervising this growth. Planning concepts identified include: a 24 hour activation of downtown, walkability, a sensitive increase of density, the use of incentives to spur development, the enhancement of public spaces, and the creation of a "sense of place."

Walkability Study

The Walkability Study highlighted some of the issues facing future development in downtown and it described the opportunity for placemaking in downtown. The report acknowledged the well-laid out

street grid, historic buildings, and location as keys that can help Round Rock become a "model walkable community." The Plan looked at the realignment of Round Rock Avenue and the introduction of roundabouts to slow traffic and increase walkability. A comprehensive Master Plan for downtown was recommended.

Master Plan

This Master Plan develops the comments and feedback from the walkability study, council retreat, and community meeting through a visioning process described on the facing page.

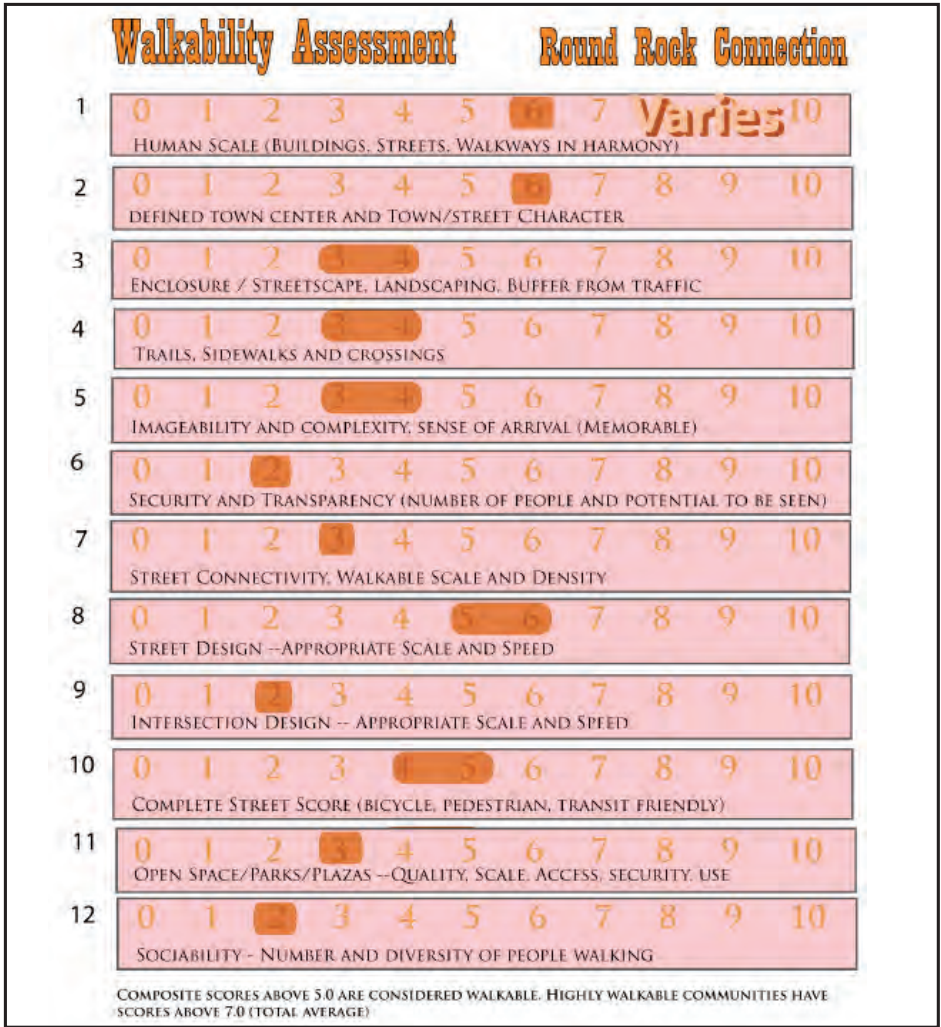
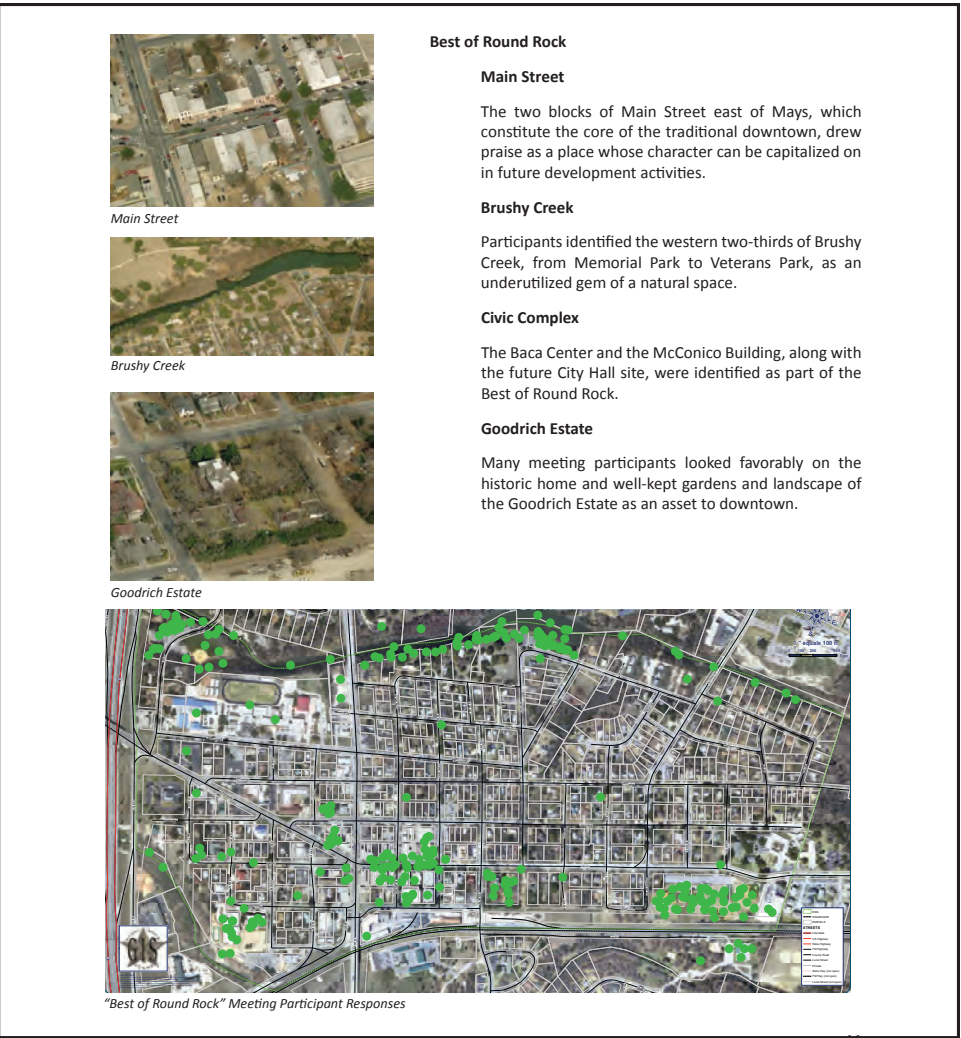


Chart from the Downtown Walkability Report, 2007.



"Best of Round Rock" page from the Scoping Report, 2007.





# COMMUNITY VISIONING PROCESS

From Fall 2008 to Spring 2009, the design team undertook an iterative community visioning process to create the Master Plan.



*Defining goals, issues, and opportunities*

In this phase the design team visited and documented the site, met with city officials, and discussed opportunities, challenges, approaches, and goals for the Master Plan. The methods and framework for the project were established.



*Assessing the existing conditions*

In this phase the design team studied reports, policies, past plans and meeting minutes, and newspaper articles, to understand what makes Round Rock tick. The team looked at planning precedents from towns around the United States.



*Community design charrette*

In the third phase of visioning, the design team and the city led a week-long community "charrette." A charrette is an intensive series of meetings, public design sessions, presentations, and focus sessions involving the public and the design team, the goal of which is to arrive at a Master Vision Plan and preliminary planning strategies.



*Refining charrette concepts into a Plan*

The community worked together with the design team to identify priorities and evaluate strategies. Ideas for streetscape improvements, urban design, circulation and traffic, architecture, open space, economic development, infrastructure, sustainability, and historic preservation were crafted, vetted and refined. After the charrette, the design team refined the vision.

An Open House was conducted for the public to review and comment on a Draft of the Plan.



*City Council meeting approving Plan*

The final draft Plan was presented to the public in Fall 2009.

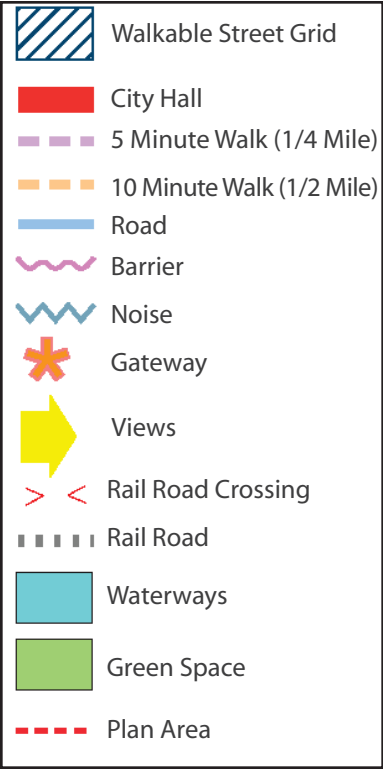




# BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

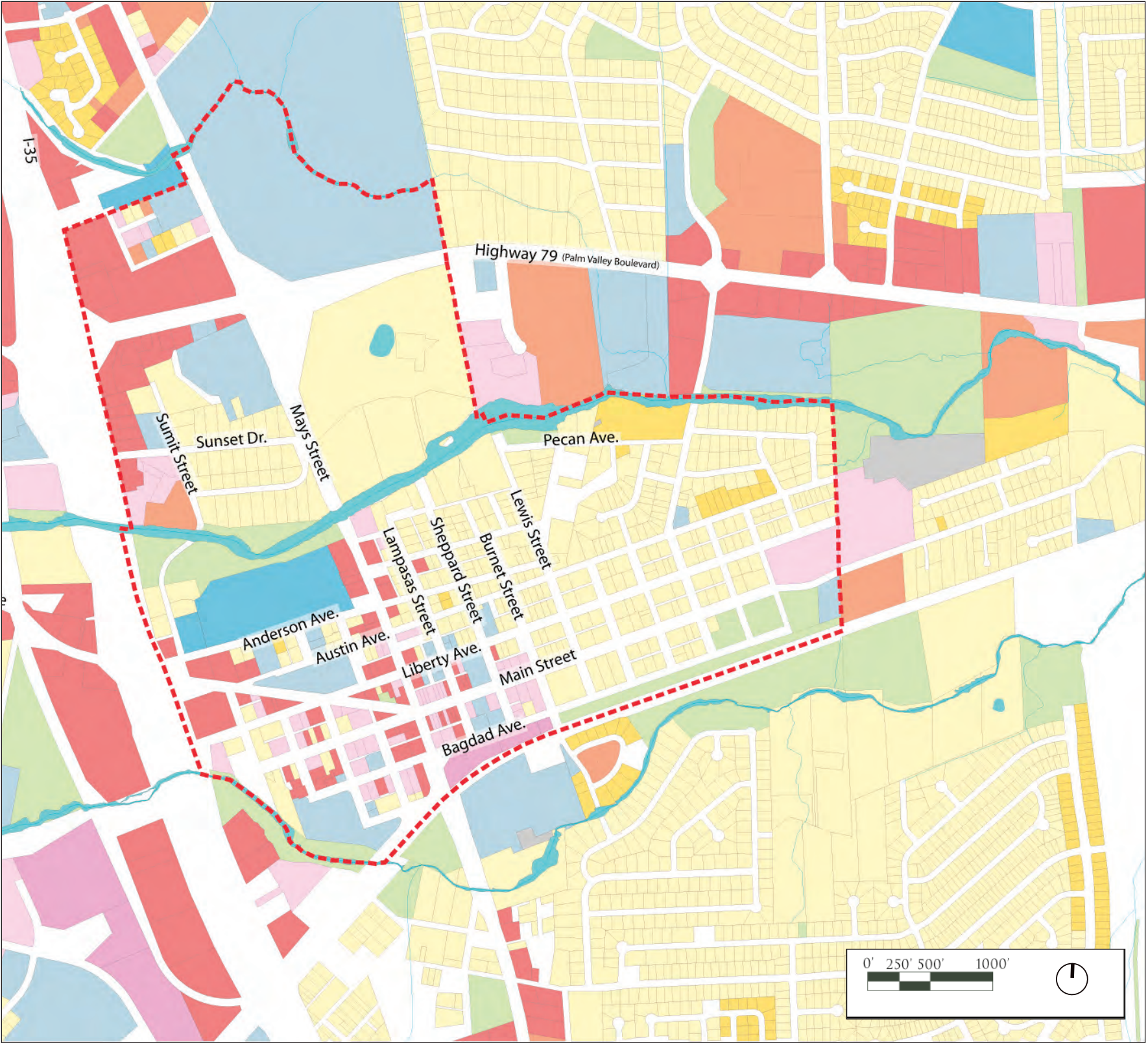
## Opportunities and Constraints

Downtown Round Rock has a tight and walkable street grid with a significant number of historical buildings. Lot sizes are small and the Main Street retail area is compact and built out. Together these characteristics make the area attractive for redevelopment and infill development that is pedestrian-oriented and “small town” in character. The location of downtown along the Interstate and adjacent to a rail line offer another opportunity for the study area. The creek is another amenity that should be capitalized upon in the Master Plan. Interstate 35, Mays, and Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) are currently barriers to development since they are wide, noisy, and hard for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross.

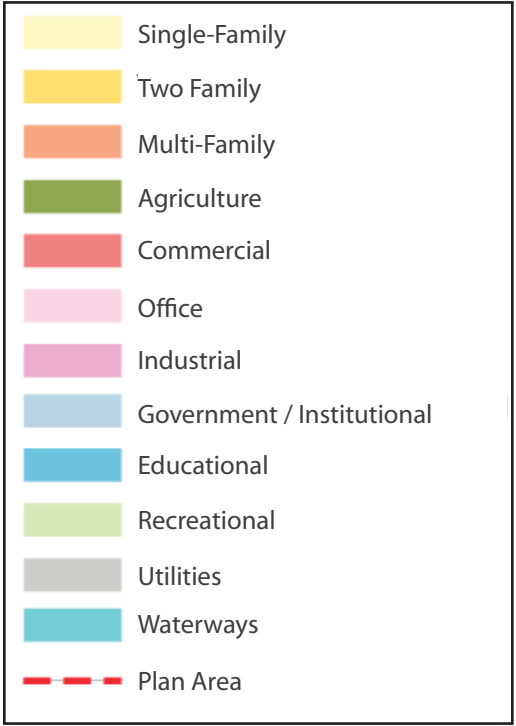




Land Use



Retail uses are clustered along the two blocks of Main Street between Mays and Sheppard, the historical downtown. Commercial uses exist along Mays and Round Rock Avenue and within southwest downtown, south of Mays and east of the Interstate. Most of the residential development within the study area is single-family on small lots. Governmental/institutional uses are located around the central downtown area.

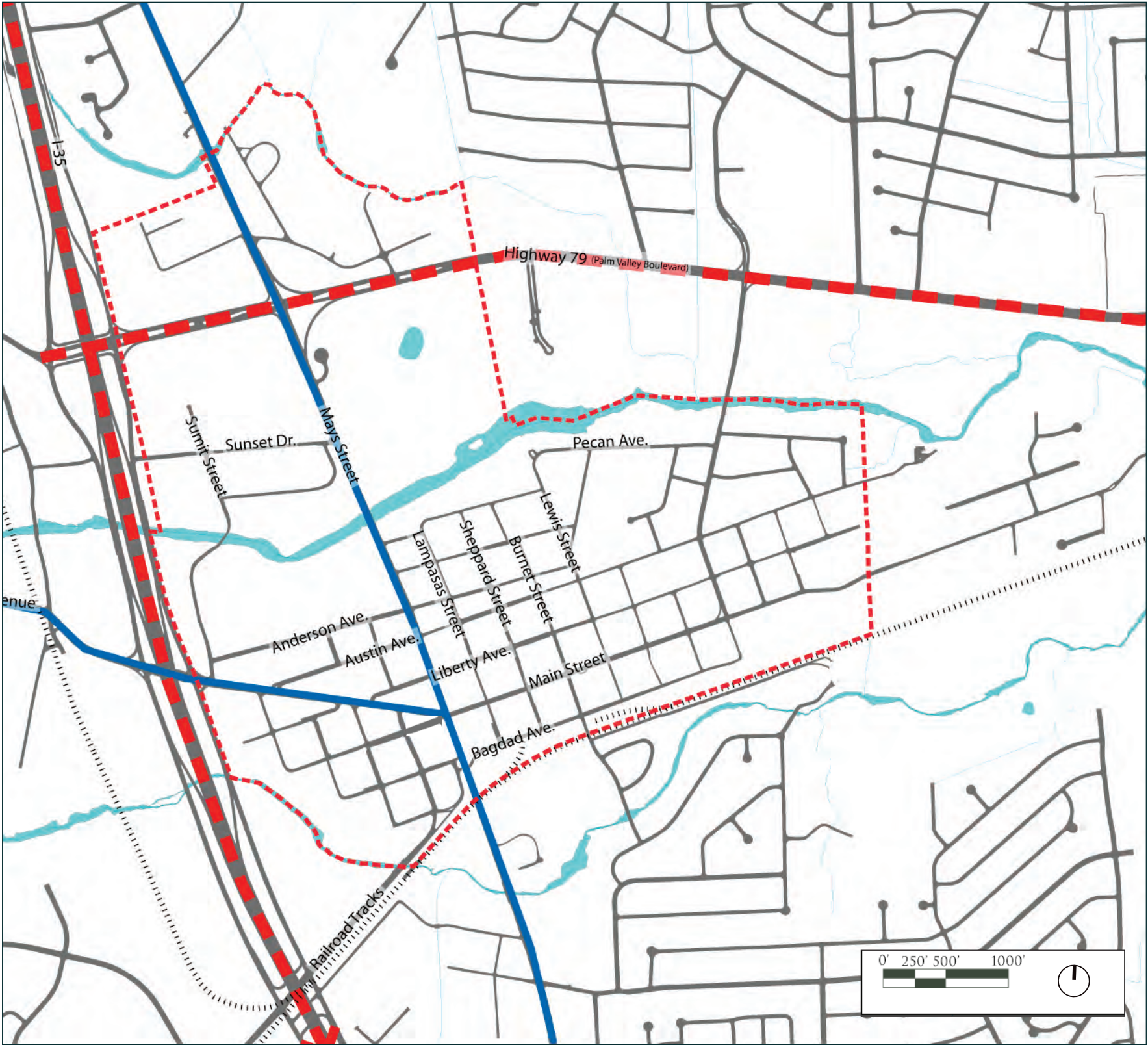


(Land Use, 2008)





Circulation



Main Street is the area's main east/west street and the historical heart of downtown. Mays Street is the primary north/south connector. Mays is used by many drivers as an Interstate bypass and accommodates traffic in four lanes. Round Rock Avenue connects downtown to the Interstate and is quite wide. Many of the smaller residential streets are narrow without sidewalks. There are few cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets in downtown; most streets connect in a tight grid formation.

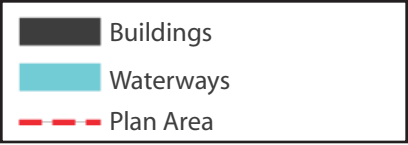




Figure Ground

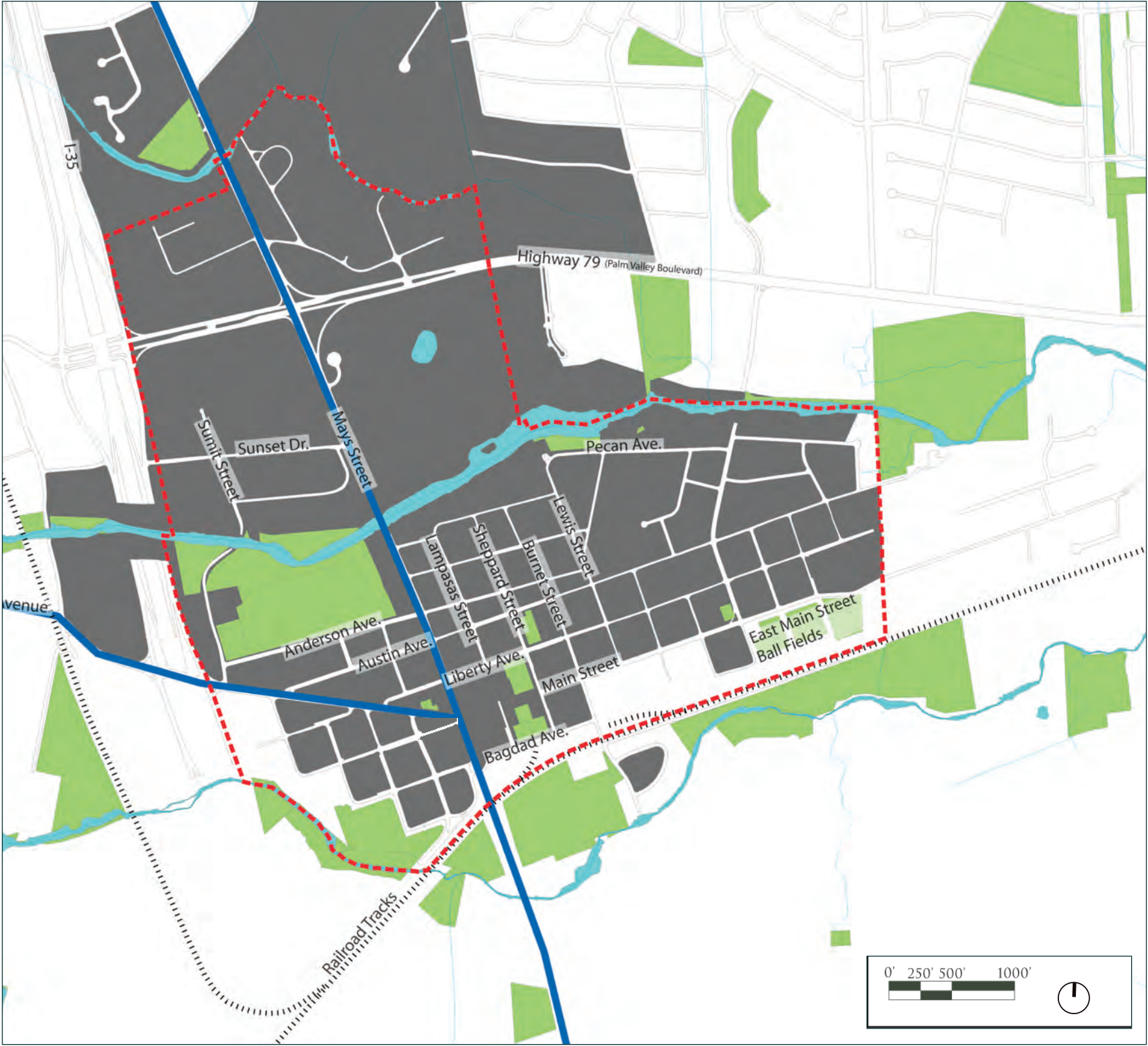


The figure / ground diagram shows buildings in black placed on a white background. The diagram helps to isolate development patterns that can help inform planning and design concepts. Within the study area, buildings are small scale and dense, compared to the auto-oriented buildings along the Interstate. Likewise houses within the study area are generally smaller than houses within the surrounding suburban areas. Larger building grain along Round Rock and Main attest to the commercial-orientation of these two streets.





Block Network



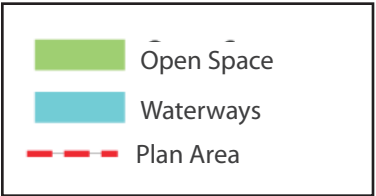
The area is differentiated from its surroundings because of its historical block street grid; much of the development around the study area is suburban in scale and layout with large blocks, cul-de-sacs, and curvilinear roads. Most of the blocks in downtown are approximately 275 feet long. The small scale of the blocks is conducive to walking and to alternate forms of transportation.



Open Space



There are a handful of public green spaces within the study area. These include the Kiwanis Field on Main Street, Veteran's Park and Memorial Park along the creek, and another interim green space where a building was demolished just west of City Hall. This space has turned into a de facto public green, signifying the potential need for more formal public green space within the main downtown area. Another significant green space, just outside of the study area, is Lake Creek Park, south of the railroad tracks.

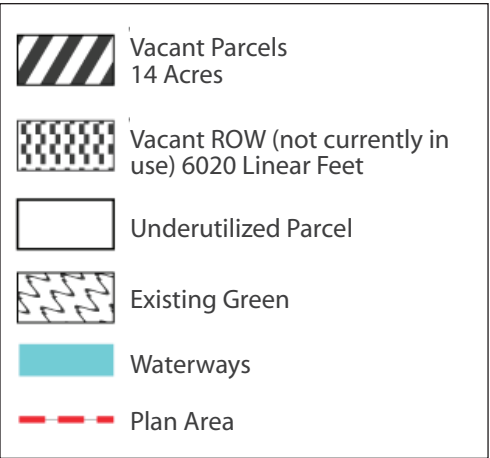




Vacant and Underutilized Lots

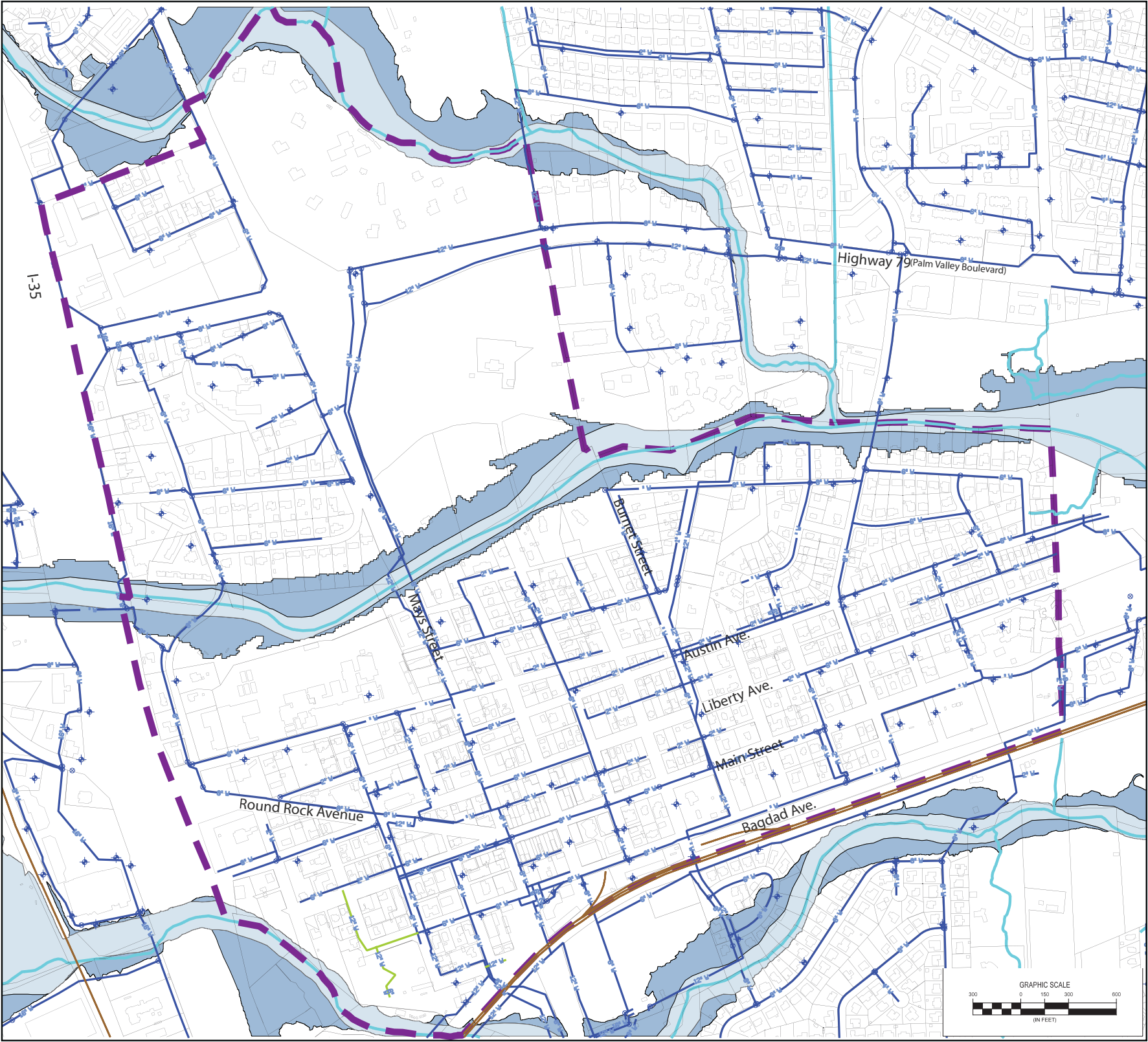


Round Rock has around 14 acres of vacant parcels within the main downtown area and over 6,000 linear feet of dedicated right-of-way space that is not currently developed with roadways or walkways. In many cases the closed right-of-ways are being used by property owners for private driveway access. The large amount of vacant land and the unused right-of-way indicate the potential for redevelopment in terms of infill development and reinstatement of street right-of-ways to increase circulation. In addition much of the area immediately north of the historic downtown is suited for higher intensity redevelopment.

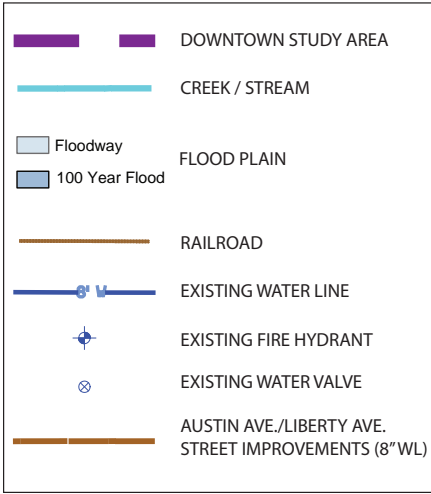




Infrastructure

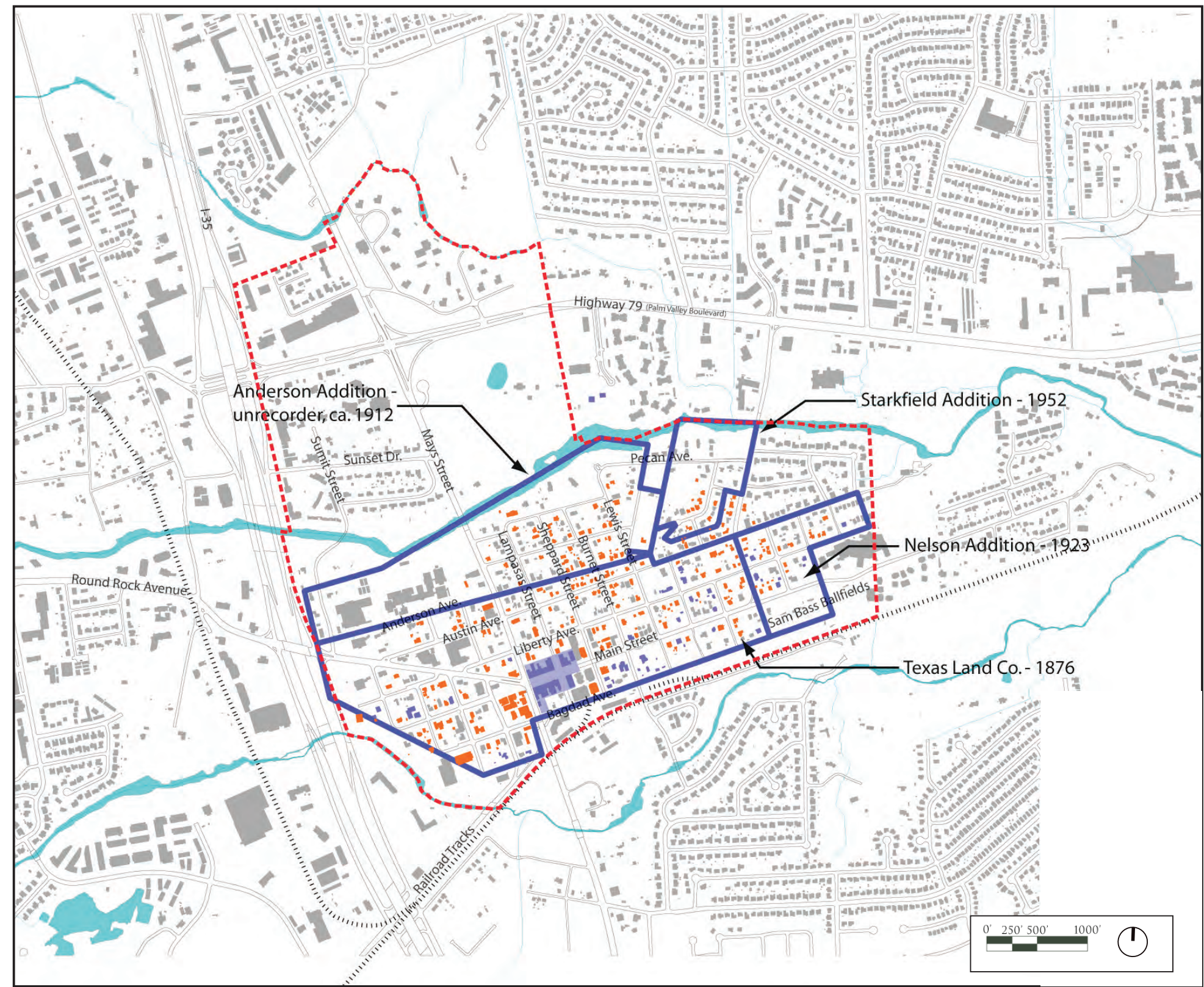


Current infrastructure in portions of the study area is insufficient to serve future demand. There is a water distribution pipeline network consisting of mostly six inch lines with some two inch and eight inch lines. The main feed is a 12 inch line on the 890 pressure level. To accommodate redevelopment and serve existing development under current codes, water system improvements are needed. The wastewater system in the downtown study area consists primarily of six and eight inch lines which tie into 18 inch and ten inch lines, extending from the treatment facility on the east side of downtown west into the downtown area. With respect to stormwater conveyance, the existing system varies substantially in character. The Round Rock Avenue and Mays Street systems include a robust storm sewer system whereas parts of the eastern downtown area rely on surface drainage with few storm sewers. There is a lack of water quality infrastructure in the southeast portion of the plan area.





Historic Sites



In 1992, the City of Round Rock completed an extensive Inventory of Historic Sites, which documented buildings in the city that were built prior to 1946. The survey documented 372 structures city-wide, 249 of which are located in the downtown area. About 25% of these structures have since been designated historic, but the remaining -- almost 200 buildings -- have not been designated, and a number have been demolished since the survey was completed. Also, structures dating from 1946 to 1959 that might exist downtown have not been documented, to date.

There are 25 buildings within the Round Rock Commercial Historic District, a National Register District established in 1983. Of these, 22 are contributing structures to the historic district, and three are non-contributing. The buildings in this National Register District are on Main Street, in the blocks between Mays and Sheppard, and the old Masonic Lodge and Post Office building faces Mays. There are also 55 buildings in the downtown area that are designated at the local level, with the City of Round Rock Historic Overlay zoning designation. Exterior changes, including demolition, proposed to these designated historic structures must be reviewed, approved and permitted by the city Historic Preservation Commission through a Certificate of Appropriateness process. Eligible properties may receive a partial property tax exemption, intended to ensure that the historic buildings are well maintained.

A review of potentially historic buildings in the study area is currently underway.

- Historic Subdivision Boundary
- National Register District
- City of Round Rock Landmark
- Property Identified in Historic Resources Survey
- Waterways
- Plan Area



# HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## What is the historical character and how is it respected and enhanced?

The Round Rock community values its historical resources. In the General Plan 2020 Survey conducted in 2008 by the city, 90% of respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed that historic, older properties are a significant benefit to the city and 87% agreed or strongly agreed that the city should use ordinances and regulations to encourage historic preservation and maintenance. 79% of people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea of removing historic properties to redevelop sites with more profitable uses.

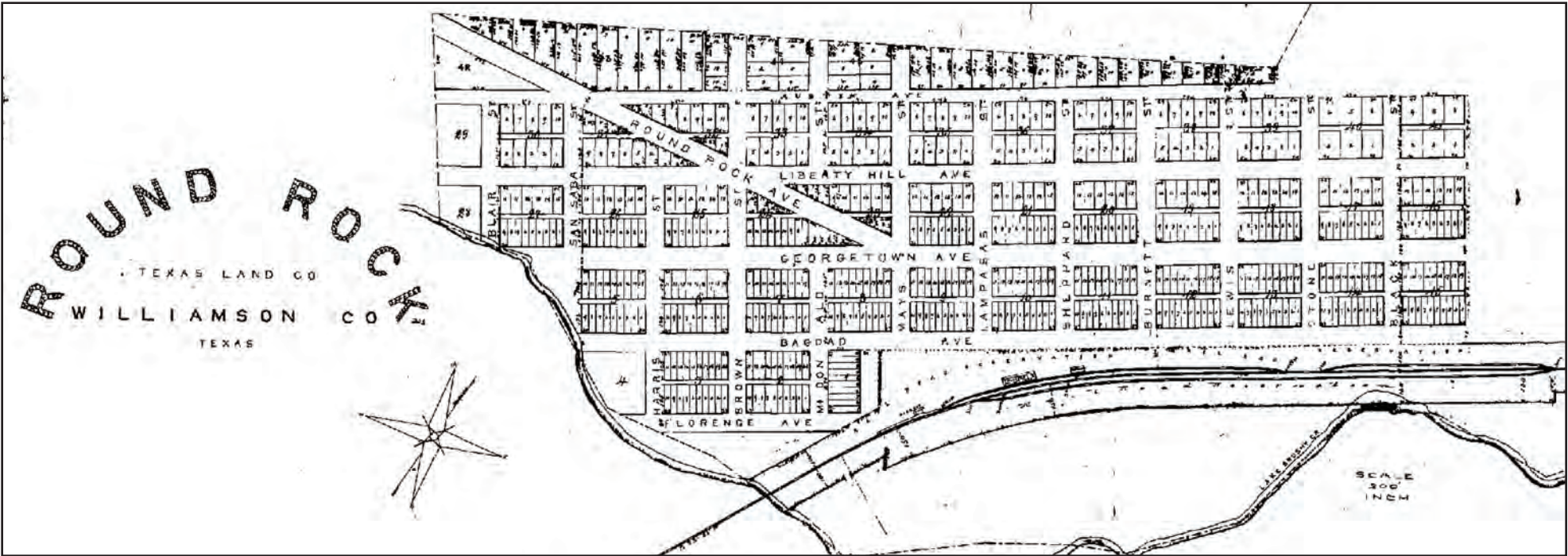
Although the area was known to native Americans for thousands of years before, the first permanent settlement of Round Rock occurred in the late 1830s along Brushy Creek. A small community formed at the crossing of the Military Road at the creek, marked by a natural “round rock” formation in the creek bed.

But it was another, more modern, mode of transportation that sparked the formation of downtown Round Rock as it is known today. In 1876, the International and Great Northern Railroad (IGN) extended track to within a mile southeast of the small settlement on Brushy Creek, and a new town sprang to life. The IGN bought 150 acres of land located between Brushy and Lake Creeks and, through the subsidiary real estate firm called the Texas Land Company, platted the north 125 acres as a town site.

The town plan was arrayed along an east-west axis, parallel to the railroad tracks, with a grid of 270’ square blocks through most of the platted area, and irregular blocks at the north and west sides of the platted area. A wide avenue, running east-west and one block above the tracks, was planned as the main commercial street, with 30’ wide lots, intended for commercial uses, shown in the blocks at the western end, closest to the railroad depot. The remaining blocks were shown with 45’ wide lots, intended for residential and other more expansive uses. No public squares or dedicated locations for public buildings were designed, but the town plan did include a very distinctive element: Round Rock Avenue, on a diagonal axis running southeast to northwest, extended from the center of the commercial district to the western edge of “New Town” Round Rock, to link the old town site on Brushy Creek with the new town created by the railroad.

“New Town” Round Rock was the western terminus of the IGN, and quickly became a center of commerce for the surrounding towns and counties. There was a building and population boom in Round Rock, and a cluster of wood-framed and load-bearing masonry commercial buildings was built in the commercial district around the depot. The wood-framed buildings are now gone, but many of the masonry buildings are extant and included in the Round Rock Commercial Historic District, designated as both local landmarks and listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1897, a public artesian well was drilled at the intersection of Main and Mays Streets. Soon after, a gazebo was built at the well and used as a bandstand for musical performances and a community gathering place. The artesian well and gazebo became a sort of town green, filling a void in the original town planning done by the IGN and the Texas Land Company. Both of these community amenities are now gone. In 1938,



Plat of the Original City of Round Rock, 1878 Williamson County Deed Records, V20/P224

the city water tower was built in the vicinity of the old artesian well, and is a prominent visual element on the city skyline. The gazebo was moved to Old Settler’s Park, but a replica was built and placed close to the original location downtown.

The earliest residential development began in the area west of Mays Street, between the commercial district and the link to Old Town Round Rock. A few buildings dating from the 1880s remain, but many have been replaced over time.

By the early 20th century, the residential areas platted by the Texas Land Company to the north and east of the commercial district were studded with houses. Swedish families, who had immigrated to the area from the 1860s on, built large, Victorian mansions east of the commercial district. The area to the north, known as “The Flat”, had small, simple houses, occupied by workers employed by the commercial and industrial concerns established along the rail line and in the quarries that had opened as the town grew. The Flat were located in a new subdivision, the Anderson Addition, surveyed in 1912. The subdivision was apparently not actually recorded at the courthouse, but the area was nonetheless filled with houses and small businesses.

In 1906, Trinity Lutheran College was opened in a prominent, Mission Revival limestone building at the east end of Main Street. Large homes of downtown merchants and prosperous farmers were built in the east end of town, near the college grounds. The Nelson family, who had given the land for the college and worked to bring it to Round Rock, developed the Nelson Addition, another residential subdivision, in 1923, although several houses in this subdivision appear to predate this event.

As the 20th century progressed, residential architectural styles changed, and Colonial Revival, other eclectic revival and Craftsman style homes

were built in the residential areas. Representative examples of a range of residential architectural styles remain in place today.

Although the railroad was a primary force in the planning and prosperity of Round Rock, its effect waned considerably as the rail lines were extended westward to other towns in the later years of the 19th century. The automobile came in to use in the early years of the 20th century across the country, and Round Rock was no exception. In 1907, there were three cars registered in Round Rock, and 23 in the entire Williamson County area.

Automobile travel grew in the early decades of the 20th century and by the 1920s, the Austin Highway or State Highway 2, passed through the east end of Round Rock on what is now Georgetown Street. Several gas stations were established on the blocks between Main and Austin; the one at the intersection of Main and Georgetown is demolished, but another a few blocks north has been converted to residential use. In 1934, State Highway 2 was replaced by US Highway 81, on Mays Street, passing through the heart of the commercial district. More gas stations, garages and tourist courts were established on the new highway. In 1945, Ranch to Market Road 620 was developed, entering downtown on the diagonal Round Rock Avenue, in the shadow of the water tower. All of these roadways were eclipsed by the construction of Interstate 35 in the late 1950s, which clipped the west edge of “New Town” and separated it from the old settlement on Brushy Creek.

By the last quarter of the 20th century, public concern about the preservation of historic downtown Round Rock arose. In 1978, the Texas Historical Commission began recording neighborhood survey data on older buildings in the downtown area. In 1979, the City of Round Rock adopted a historic preservation ordinance, intended to protect the city’s unique cultural and architectural heritage. The preservation





ordinance added a Historic Overlay District zoning category to the city code and created the Historic Preservation Commission to administer the historic designation process. The zoning is applicable to both individual properties and groups of properties, or districts.

To ensure that designated historic structures are properly preserved, properties with the Historic Overlay District zoning must participate in the Certificate of Appropriateness review process. Exterior changes proposed to historic structures must be reviewed, approved and permitted by the Historic Preservation Commission. To encourage ongoing maintenance and care of historic properties, a partial property tax exemption program was added to the preservation program in 1988. Eligible properties receive a 75% exemption of the municipal property taxes, a benefit that must be applied for each year.

In 1983, the Round Rock Commercial Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The district is in the 100 and 200 blocks of East Main Street and includes 22 contributing and 3 non-contributing buildings. The buildings are one and two-story commercial structures, built during the last quarter of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century. Masonry is the predominant building



Postcard view of Main Street, looking east, around 1908  
UTSA's Institute of Texan Cultures, No.90-165



Downtown Round Rock, around 1920  
Image courtesy of City of Round Rock

material in the district, generally local limestone, sometimes dressed with handsome ornament. There are also examples of iron, sheet metal and brick masonry building fronts in the district.

In 1992, the City of Round Rock completed an extensive Inventory of Historic Sites, a cultural resources survey. The survey documented buildings within the city limits and the ETJ that were built prior to 1946. Each building documented in the survey was classified as a high, medium or low priority ranking, based on the historical and cultural significance and architectural integrity of the building. High and medium priority buildings were assessed as meeting National Register standards for contributing resources, potentially eligible for National Register listing as individual landmarks or as part of a larger neighborhood-based district. In cases where a medium or low priority rating was applied due to alterations made, completion of an appropriate restoration or rehabilitation project may justify re-prioritizing to a higher category. The survey documented 372 structures, two-thirds of which are located in the downtown area. Based on the survey findings, all of the sites identified as Priority 1 have been zoned historic. A few buildings documented in the survey have been demolished, including some identified as Priority 1 structures.

In 1997, the City of Round Rock completed the final portion of the inventory and cultural resources survey process by linking the 1992 survey data to the city Atlas Geographic Information System (GIS) database. The project was called the GIS Inventory of Historic Sites. Priority ranking, photographs, historical and architectural survey data and geographic location information for each of the 372 survey sites. Maps of portions of downtown, showing the locations of the buildings documented in the Historic Sites Inventory and their priority rating, were also prepared as part of this effort.

Design Guidelines for Historic Commercial and Residential Districts and Properties were adopted by the City Council. The document is a guide for property owners, civic appointees, and officials to assist in both the preservation of historic properties and the development of compatible infill or new construction adjacent to historic properties. The guidelines include general principles, consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, to retain historic fabric whenever possible, replace in kind when necessary, and make compatible, reversible additions or exterior alterations. The guidelines are illustrated with diagrams and photographs and address both commercial and residential buildings and sites.

During the community design charrette, stakeholders offered suggestions, thoughts, and comments on the historic character of Round Rock. As cited previously, the community highly values the historic character of the city, and there was overwhelming support for preserving historic districts and buildings in the context of this Master Plan. Stakeholders representing the commercial district expressed an interest in maintaining a mix of uses to provide vitality, streetscape improvements to enhance appeal and access, and provision of parking within easy access. The notion of patio or outdoor dining was appealing, as were opportunities for community gatherings and events, provisions for galleries, exhibits, theatre, dance, and children's activities downtown. Some expressed concern that things not be "frozen in time", others offered specific suggestions to retain or add canopies to the commercial streetscape.

Stakeholders representing the residential district of downtown expressed an interest in preserving the historic context and visual character of the old neighborhoods, perhaps through a residential historic district. Commercial or office uses in the transition zone between the commercial district and the residential district should retain the existing residential building type and scale, as opposed to demolishing existing buildings. They also expressed quality of life issues, including concerns about traffic speeds through the neighborhoods, a need for crosswalks at the Georgetown and Main intersection, and improvements in sidewalks, and lighting in the neighborhoods. They expressed an interest in new amenities, including more park space, a corner grocery store, and live music and coffee venues downtown.

To date, the City of Round Rock has shown great foresight with regard to historic preservation issues. The preservation ordinance, inventory of historic sites, and preservation design guidelines are useful tools to inform this Master Plan process. The historic designations in place have effectively preserved the most significant resources, but those sites identified as Priority 2 and 3 should be reviewed, in the course of this plan, for possible inclusion in historic overlay districts.



Main Street, looking west from Trinity College, around 1908  
UTSA's Institute of Texan Cultures, No.097-0778



Adolph Engstrand House, 207 N. Stone Street, around 1907  
UTSA's Institute of Texan Cultures, No.096-1366





# MARKET ANALYSIS

The following summarizes the findings of the market analysis (March 2009). For the detailed study, see the Appendix.

## Introduction

The economic analysis by Economics Research Associates (ERA), informs design decisions incorporated into the Master Plan. The analysis looks at general demographic and real estate trends in the Round Rock area, and potential demand for retail, residential, and office space in the downtown area.

## Market Overview of the Austin Region

- According to a recent overview by Wells Fargo Economics (June-July 2008), the national downturn is hitting the Austin region harder than other Texas metropolitan areas. The employment growth rate is slowing and unemployment is increasing, although the unemployment rate for the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) remains relatively low. While median home prices have decreased in the region, the decline has not been as drastic as that experienced in other parts of the country.
- The biggest risk to the regional housing market is the rate of inflation. If interest rates are increased too aggressively by the Federal Reserve, it is anticipated that the housing market will remain flat through 2009. It appears that housing permit issues are close to the bottom of the cycle in the housing market. As a further indication of the weak housing market, the months in inventory index for housing is expected to increase (the month in inventory index increased to 5.3 months in April, up from 3.1 months in early 2007).

## Office Market

- Recently, slowing job growth and new empty buildings have contributed to an overall vacancy rate of 17.2% within the Austin-Round Rock office market - the highest recorded vacancy rate since early 2005. As a result, some landlords are offering free rent and other incentives in order to attract tenants. Rents fell in the third quarter across all classes of office space. An estimated 2.0 million square feet of new office space is currently under construction as a result of more favorable job growth conditions forecast during the planning stages for the projects. Vacancy rates are expected to continue to increase across the region as the area absorbs the significant amount of new office space currently under construction.
- The construction of regional toll roads such as State Highway 45 and the development of La Frontera, with over one million square feet of retail space, have helped to increase the viability of Round Rock as an attractive office market.
- As of third quarter 2008, the Round Rock submarket recorded a relatively high vacancy rate of 37.0% in 1.7 million square feet of space. The high vacancy rate is due in part to the significant office inventory which came on line during the third quarter in Round

Rock – 439,852 square feet of new space was added. As might be expected, overall Class A rent levels are currently relatively low in Round Rock - \$26.78 per square foot/year versus \$31.10 for the entire Austin regional market. An additional 270,000 square feet of office space is listed as under construction within the Round Rock submarket.

- While total jobs increased over the past year within the Austin-Round Rock MSA, the rate of job growth has declined and it is expected that office leasing activity in the region will not rebound until there is a rebound in the local job market. The national credit crisis and uncertainty on Wall Street are further hampering the local office market.
- Projected office demand in downtown Round Rock is based in part on forecast employment growth within the Austin-Round Rock MSA. Based on projections provided by TXP (an economic and policy consulting group based in Austin) in April of 2008, the strong appeal of the region for expansion by both residents and firms has allowed Austin to perform better than many other regions across the country.
- We have estimated that new employment growth in the area between 2007 and 2023 (it is assumed that office space recently built/under construction accounts for some of the recent employment growth) will generate office space demand for 1.7 million square feet of new office space in the area. Given just over 900,000 square feet of space which is vacant (newly constructed) or under construction, new office space demand is likely satisfied for the next several years. Small-scale, niche office space (live/work) may be a possibility in the downtown area for those tenants looking for non-traditional office space. It is estimated that the downtown district could reasonably capture 8 to 10% of total office market demand, or long term demand of approximately 73,000 to 91,000 square feet of new office space.

## Housing Market

- Building permits issued in Williamson County reflect the ongoing downturn, with a drop in permits issued of just over 50% from 2007 (through October) to 2008 (through October). The county also experienced a notable drop from 2006 to 2007 in total permits issued, with a year end decrease of about 24% reported.
- Data through November of 2008, compared to the previous time frame one year ago, reveals that total certificates of occupancy issued within the city have decreased by 42%.
- Total home sales in the Austin MSA are estimated to drop by about 15% from 2007 to 2008, with the average sales price decreasing only slightly to \$244,900. Total listings have also reached a relatively high 11,806.
- Housing market demand is based on projected population growth for the region (Austin-Round Rock MSA) and the downtown's

relative fair share capture of new growth. The analysis also assumes that new downtown residential development will include a mix of housing types, potentially including attached ownership, rental, live-work, and mixed-use development (e.g. combining housing with office and/or retail) units.

- It is likely that new housing development will be restricted by available space for construction rather than market demand. Based on estimates, 207 new residential units are supportable between 2009 and 2013, 240 units between 2013 and 2018, and 257 new units between 2018 and 2023.

## Retail Market

- Occupancy rates for retail space range from 73 percent to 97 percent across all Austin-Round Rock MSA districts. In Round Rock, 91 percent of the retail space was occupied, leaving approximately 245,000 square feet vacant.
- The top ten retail centers (in terms of size) located close to the City of Round Rock account for approximately 4.7 million square feet of retail – a significant existing supply.
- Due to the existing pedestrian environment, the 100 block of East Main Street is the primary opportunity and the 200 block is the secondary opportunity for retail improvements in downtown Round Rock. ERA recommends and supports urban planning initiatives to reconfigure or enhance (from the pedestrian's perspective) the intersection of Main and Mays Street.
- ERA estimated the amount of square feet of retail in different usage categories to better understand the balance of retail to office to consumer service in the downtown core (the area of downtown south of the creek). It should be noted that these estimates are not exact and are based on limited available building dimensions and current tenant listings. We have estimated that there is approximately 10,000 square feet of retail space and 25,000 square feet of restaurant/food oriented space, and 83,000 square feet of "other" (civic, office, vacant) located in the downtown core area.
- ERA assessed market demand for retail in downtown Round Rock. The retail demand analysis is based upon the identification of potential key markets that will likely generate sales in downtown Round Rock (provided the right retail environment is present) and their purchasing power. People who live in the Round Rock area will be downtown's major customers, however, it is important to differentiate residents based on their proximity to downtown. For this reason ERA defined Primary and Secondary Trade Areas from which downtown Round Rock could potentially draw customers.
- Only a portion of household expenditures will occur in downtown Round Rock. This is largely dependent on the quality of the tenant mix as a whole and individual retailers, as well as market factors. Several variables impact market penetration including: (1) proximity to downtown Round Rock, (2) access to downtown,



(3) market characteristics and typical expenditure patterns, (4) proximity to competitive offerings. ERA included an estimated range of potential captured expenditures.

- We estimate that the downtown core (the downtown area south of the creek) could support between 107,000 and 145,000 square feet of active retail space, thereby creating a downtown destination core of retail space.
- As a true main street in the midst of big-box centers, strip malls, and indoor malls, downtown Round Rock can offer a different product. The balance of retail types and sizes is critical to the overall success of a project. Furthermore, downtown Round Rock increases its successes for making deals if it does not compete with the mega shopping centers for their national chain oriented tenants.
- Currently Round Rock has approximately 120,000 square feet of ground level street-oriented space in its downtown core (the downtown area south of the creek). ERA recommends that retail recruitment efforts take advantage of this space. Round Rock should fulfill retail demand by first filling existing ground level space with retail before building more space.

Hotel and Tourism Market

- Most major chains already have a presence in the Round Rock area, reflecting in part the population and employment growth that has occurred in the area over the past several years.
- The only full-service hotel in the area, Marriott North, is located near Dell Headquarters. Other hotels in the area are primarily limited service, located along Interstate 35, the main access route through the region.
- Currently, the Austin-Round Rock market offers a limited-service focused series of lodging options with price points and average daily rates (ADR's) generally falling below \$100 per day
- Most of the hotel products are concentrated along Interstate 35 at the Round Rock exits. The exception is the full-service Marriott located near the Dell Headquarters offices just south of the Downtown Master Plan study area.
- The greater Austin area follows the pattern in many Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA's), with higher price levels and occupancies occurring in the Central Business Districts (CBD's) and more budget prices properties locating in the outer areas. Round Rock falls within this price and performance range.
- Visitation to the greater Austin market is strong and growing.
- Tourism is predominantly leisure travel.
- Business travel produced 36 percent of person-days to the Austin MSA.
- The patterns of visitation to the Austin area indicate a strong drive-to orientation, with 72 percent of travelers arriving by automobile. Traffic counts along Interstate 35 at Round Rock support this pattern, with an estimated 50,000 cars per day (or

about 18 million vehicles per year in both directions). Sixty-four percent of person-days were generated by travelers from 250 miles or less (one-way).

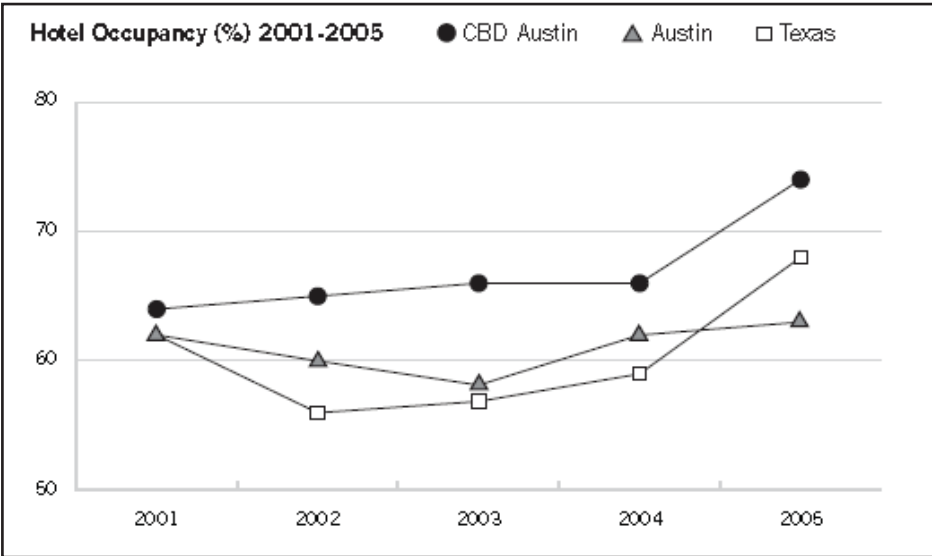
- There are currently 26,000 hotel rooms in the greater Austin market area.
- The Austin-Round Rock market performs favorably compared to the Texas market overall.
- Round Rock's hotel occupancy for the 2nd quarter 2008 was down just over five percentage points from 2nd quarter 2007, with the average daily room rate increasing from \$93.92 to \$95.86.

	Percent of Market
High End	48%
Mid-Level	32%
Economy	20%
Total	100%
Source: Smith Travel Research, Economics Research Associates, 2008.	

Current hotel supply

Property	Total Rooms
Austin Marriott at Round Rock	295
Best Western Executive Inn	70
Candlewood Suites	98
Comfort Suites	63
Country Inn and Suites	61
Courtyard by Marriott	113
DaysInn and Suites	49
Extended Stay America North	138
Hampton Inn-Austin Round Rock	94
Hilton Garden Inn	122
Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites	91
La Quinta Inn North	116
La Quinta Inn South	86
Residence Inn - Round Rock	96
Round Rock Inn	60
Springhill Suites	104
Staybridge Suites	81
Value Place	120
Wingate by Wyndham	100
TOTAL	1,957
Source: Round Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau, Economics Research Associates	

Hotel inventory in Round Rock



Area hotel occupancies

	Revenue	% Occupancy	Room Nights Sold	Ave. Daily Rate
2008				
2nd Q	\$12,519,000	69.4%	130,600	\$95.86
1st Q	\$12,045,000	72.1%	134,300	\$89.69
2007				
4th Q	\$10,772,000	66.8%	127,100	\$84.75
3rd Q	\$11,890,000	70.3%	133,700	\$88.93
2nd Q	\$13,186,000	74.6%	140,400	\$93.92
1st Q	\$11,957,000	76.5%	142,500	\$83.91
2006				
4th Q	\$10,317,000	69.1%	131,600	\$78.40
3rd Q	\$11,338,000	72.6%	138,100	\$82.10
2nd Q	\$11,786,000	73.0%	137,400	\$85.78
1st Q	\$9,570,000	69.9%	130,300	\$73.45
2005				
4th Q	\$8,362,000	63.8%	121,500	\$68.82
3rd Q	\$8,827,000	63.7%	121,200	\$72.83
2nd Q	\$9,419,000	68.0%	131,600	\$71.57
1st Q	\$7,873,000	64.0%	122,600	\$64.22
Note: Average daily rate calculated as room revenue divided by rooms sold.				
Based on sample of 20 hotels.				
Source: City of Round Rock, Economics Research Associates				

Hotel performance trends in Round Rock





# TRAFFIC ANALYSIS

The following describes the existing conditions of circulation and traffic in downtown, as included in the Traffic Analysis, March 2009. For the detailed study, see Appendix.

## Introduction

Existing conditions capacity analyses were conducted for AM and PM peak hours for various intersections using Synchro, software developed to automate procedures found in the Highway Capacity Manual. Results of the capacity analysis are reported in Level of Service (LOS) format, with the most favorable conditions designated as LOS A and the poorest conditions indicated by LOS F. Level of service is based on the amount of delay each vehicle encounters at the intersection.

Typically, for densely developed urban environments, LOS D or better in a typical peak hour is considered acceptable from the standpoint of motor vehicle mobility. The level of service criteria for signalized intersections, along with a brief description of the conditions experienced for each level of service grade, can be seen in Table 1 in the Appendix. The level of service criteria for non-signalized intersections can be seen in Table 2 in the Appendix.

## Existing Conditions

In order to look at the existing conditions of the circulation systems in downtown, the operational concerns and functionality gaps were identified. Currently, there are numerous operational issues within the study area:

### KEY INTERSECTIONS (See Key on right)

- **Main / Round Rock / Mays.** Significant delays occur at this intersection. Overall, the intersection has LOS E during the peak hours with major approaches at LOS F. To provide for the heavy left turn demands, the signals are configured to serve only one direction at a time, which is referred to as “split phasing.” While an appropriate strategy for the existing configuration of this intersection, it is one of the most inefficient methods of traffic signal timing because intersection movements which do not conflict can not be served simultaneously. From a walkability perspective, this intersection presents significant challenges: crossing distances are relatively long; some of the existing curb ramps are not ADA compliant; the angled intersection of Round Rock Avenue causes pedestrians to look far over their shoulder to determine if approaching traffic is yielding; and the relatively heavy eastbound to southbound right turns create challenges for pedestrians wishing to cross the street. Because of the heavy left turn demands along Mays, the inside through lanes function as de facto left turn lanes.
- **Georgetown and Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79).** The northbound and southbound approaches are split phased due to a lack of separate left turn lanes. While there are pedestrian signals, there are no curb ramps or crosswalks which results in significant challenges for pedestrians to cross.

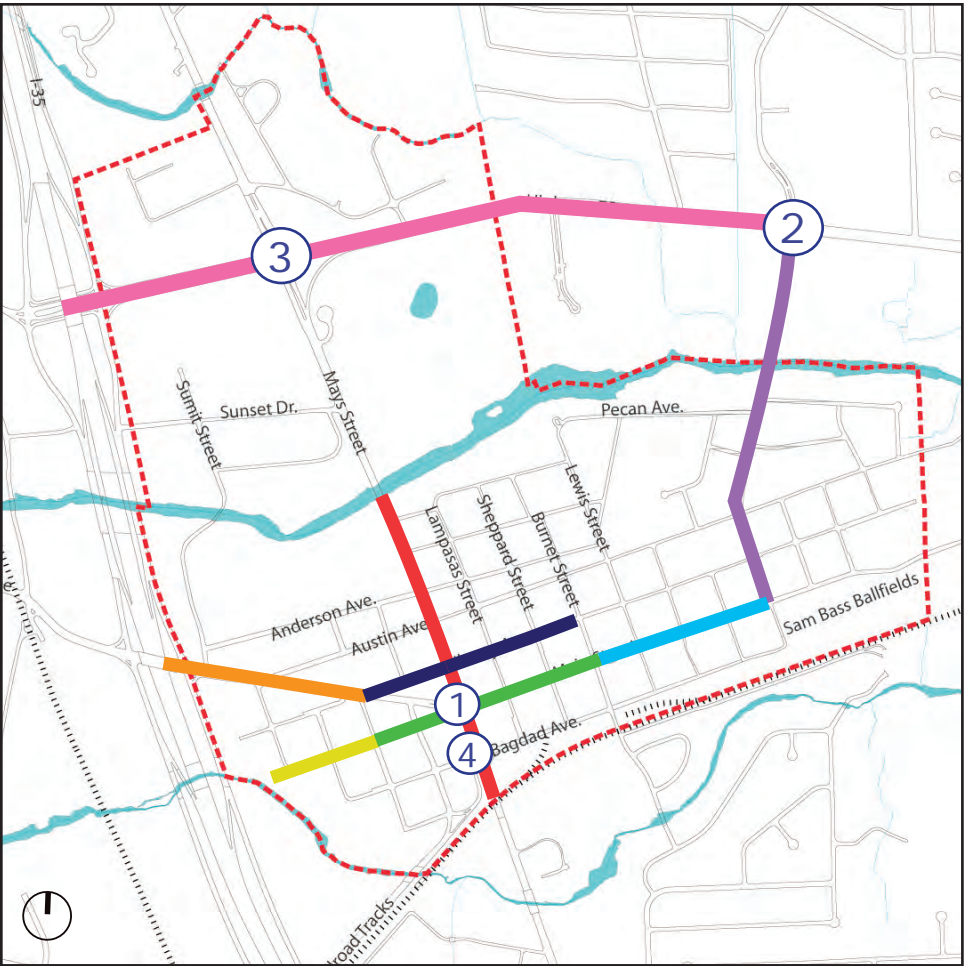
- **Mays and Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79).** There are no pedestrian signals, curb ramps or crosswalks at this intersection. Coupled with the dedicated right turn lanes and right turn slip ramps, this intersection is especially hazardous for use by pedestrians.
- **Bagdad under Mays.** The Bagdad underpass of Mays is not in compliance with currently accepted geometric design standards. Horizontal curves do not accommodate a large vehicle to turn and remain within its marked lane, and the vertical clearance does not accommodate fire apparatus or other road-legal trucks. Pedestrian facilities are not ADA compliant and pass through an area where bat guano accumulations are notable. There is no roadway or pedestrian lighting. The stub connection of Bagdad to Mays just north of the bridge structure serves as a barrier to walkability along the Mays Street corridor.

### KEY ROADS

- **Mays from Brushy Creek bridge to Lake Creek bridge.** Mays is the challenging street for the study area. At present, the north/south approaches to the intersection of Main Street/Round Rock and Mays are over-capacity during the peak hours, thus throughput along Mays is limited to the capacity of this signalized intersection. Other intersections have reserve capacity.

The sidewalks along this roadway are typically four feet wide and are not ADA compliant; some portions do not have sidewalks. Parking is prohibited and the inside lanes tend to function as de facto left turn lanes.

- **Round Rock from Interstate 35 to Brown.** While not specifically modeled, field observations suggest the intersections along this street have reserve capacity.
- **Main from San Saba to Brown.** While not specifically modeled, field observations suggest the intersections along this portion of the Round Rock/Main Street corridor are under-capacity.
- **Main from Brown to Burnet.** At present, the east/west approaches to the intersection of Main/Round Rock and Mays are over-capacity during the peak hours.
- **Main from Burnet to Georgetown.** At present, the intersections along this portion of Main Street are under-capacity.
- **Georgetown from Main to Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79).** Although Georgetown is a four lane roadway, the bridge crossing Brushy Creek is only two lanes wide. Sidewalks along the corridor are not contiguous. At present the street has reserve capacity.
- **Liberty from Brown to Burnet.** At present, the east/west approaches to the intersection of Liberty and Mays has reserve capacity during the peak hours.
- **Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) from Interstate 35 to Georgetown.** This corridor provides critical regional connectivity to communities east of Round Rock. It also creates



Key for existing circulation conditions

- KEY INTERSECTIONS**
- 1 Main / Round Rock / Mays
  - 2 Georgetown and Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79)
  - 3 Mays and Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79)
  - 4 Bagdad under Mays
- KEY ROADS**
- Mays from Brushy Creek bridge to Lake Creek bridge
  - Round Rock from Interstate 35 to Brown
  - Main from San Saba to Brown
  - Main from Brown to Burnet
  - Main from Burnet to Georgetown
  - Georgetown from Main to Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79)
  - Liberty from Brown to Burnet
  - Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) from Interstate 35 to Georgetown

a linear obstacle to walkability between the north and south sides of the corridor. According to various sources, a variety of future concepts for the corridor have been considered from a vehicular mobility standpoint:

- Grade-separated direct-connector ramps between US 79 and Interstate 35. This facility would be similar to the existing interchange between the Interstate and State Highway 45 toll road along the southern limits of Round Rock. Vertical clearance requirements would likely dictate elevated roadways along Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) to some point east of Mays. There would likely be significant right-of-way impacts in the vicinity of Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) and the Interstate. Walkability and enhanced redevelopment potential of adjacent properties are not supported by this option. This option is not included in regional modeling by Capitol Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) through 2030.
- Extension of Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) westward to RM 620 . This concept would provide linkage between the two roadways and would eliminate the need to utilize Interstate 35 to travel between the two routes. The intersection of Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) and Interstate 35 could be either at-grade or grade-separated. The alignment would travel along a portion of Sam Bass Road and cross Brushy Creek near the historic Chisholm Trail crossing. Concerns regarding historical and environmental impacts are anticipated to be associated with this concept. This option is not included in CAMPO’s regional modeling through 2030.
- Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) elevated main lanes. Similar to the reconstructed portion of US 183 west of Interstate 35 in Austin, this concept would provide four or more lanes on an elevated structure and multi-lane frontage roads at grade for local access. This concept is supported by the grade-separated direct-connector ramps presented previously. This concept would likely require additional right-of-way along the length of the elevated portion of roadway. Walkability and enhanced development potential of adjacent properties are not supported by this option. This option is not included in CAMPO’s regional modeling through 2030.

- Widening of Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) to provide additional lanes. Regional modeling by CAMPO for 2030 anticipates Palm Valley Boulevard (Highway 79) being widened from four lanes to six lanes. While providing no additional details, the concept is assumed to preserve at-grade signalized intersections. This option could be designed to remain within existing right-of-way. While the redevelopment potential of the adjacent properties remains unchanged, walkability is not improved by this option due to the additional width of roadway.

