

# Master Plan for DOWNTOWN ROCKDALE



October 2012



With Market Assistance From





October 19, 2012

Mr. Chris Dyess  
Rockdale Downtown Association  
134 North Main Street  
Rockdale, Texas 76567

Reference: Final report of the Rockdale Downtown Master Plan Report

Dear Mr. Dyess:

Halff Associates is pleased to submit this final report for the Rockdale Downtown Master Plan. This document is the culmination of an extensive planning process over the past year that involved key stakeholders, Association staff, City staff, elected officials, business owners and most importantly the citizens of Rockdale.

The citizens of Rockdale envision downtown to become a key part of the heart and soul of Rockdale - a destination where people love to live, work and play. The desire is to preserve the history and character of the buildings and streets that make up downtown, and by doing so address the following three goals: to build a downtown community, to create a sense of place, and to enhance the value of the area. This document identifies opportunities and actions to fulfill this vision for Downtown Rockdale, and to make it a truly livable and special place.

We are honored to have worked with you, your staff, and the citizens of Rockdale. We believe that this master plan provides you with a blueprint to restore the value and importance to downtown.

Sincerely,

Halff Associates, Inc.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Carrillo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jim Carrillo, FAICP, ASLA  
Director of Planning/Vice President

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Downtown Master Plan would not have been possible without the feedback, input and support provided by Rockdale's citizens. We'd like to thank all participants in the planning process who live, work, play or use downtown, other interested individuals who gave their feedback on this planning effort, and members of the Rockdale Downtown Association who made themselves available to provide information related to this master plan.



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# Chapter 1

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

**“Our Main Streets tell us who we are and who we were, and how the past has shaped us. We do not go to bland suburbs or enclosed shopping malls to learn about our past, explore our culture, or discover our identity. Our Main Streets are the places of shared memory where people still come together to live, work, and play.”**

~National Trust for Historic Preservation, Main Street Program

# PURPOSE OF THE DOWNTOWN PLANNING EFFORT

In 2011, the Rockdale Downtown Association hired Halff Associates, Inc. to develop a downtown master plan for the downtown area of Rockdale. The master plan is intended to establish a vision for the future of Downtown Rockdale, and outline a framework of actions to realize that vision. Future funding and development decisions should be guided by the vision and goals of this master plan.

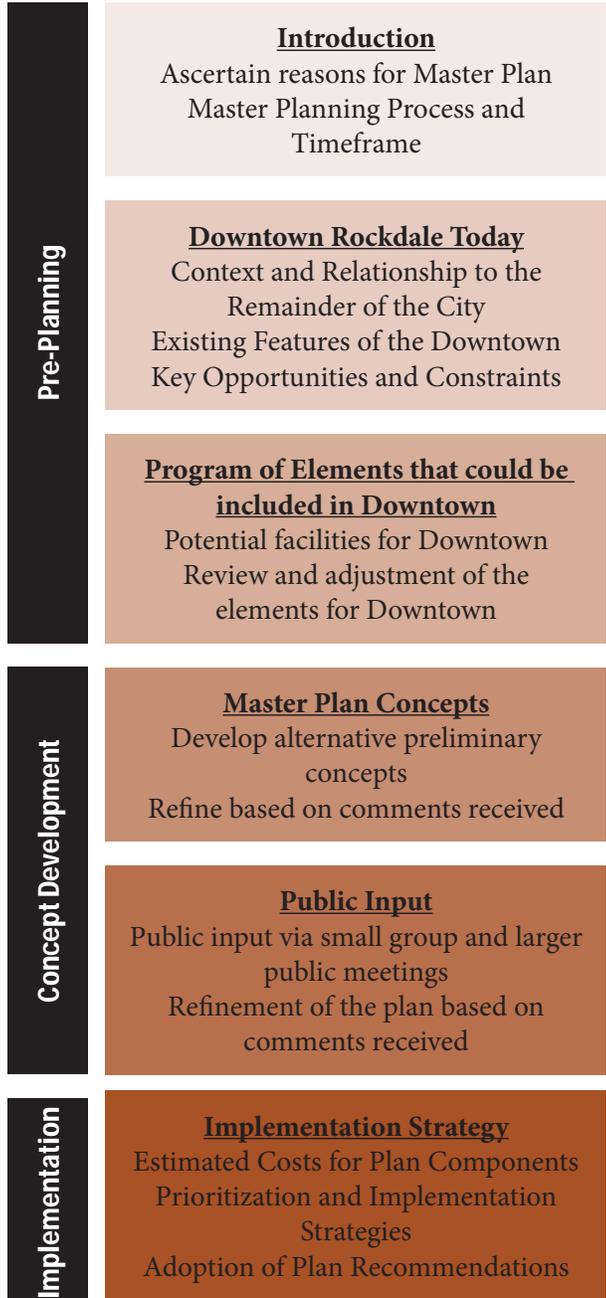
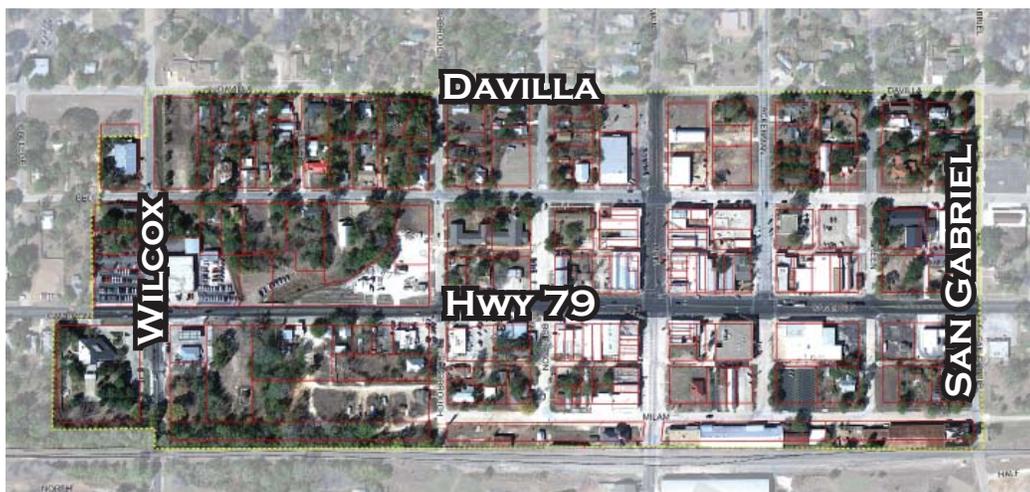
A master plan is a focused review of the issues surrounding a particular area, and the development of a strategy to begin to address the key needs of that area. Development of a master plan is a process that involves review and refinement based on the input that is received. The master planning process includes the steps shown by the figure to the right.

The Master Plan is intended to guide the redevelopment of Downtown over the next ten years. Like any master plan, external conditions that impact the master plan may change over time, and require that it be periodically updated. This master plan should be viewed as a flexible guide for the redevelopment of the area, and can be modified if key needs or unique opportunities arise. However, business and property owner involvement should be a key part of any recommendation to revise the master plan once it is completed.

## Regional Context and Study Area

Rockdale is located in Milam County, approximately 43 miles east of Round Rock, and 30 miles west of Hearne on Highway 79. Highway 79 is the major arterial link to the City, and bisects the downtown area.

The limits of the downtown study area are shown on the map below. It is bordered by Davilla Ave. to the north, San Gabriel St. to the east, the railroad tracks to the south, and one block west of Wilcox St.



## A Brief History of Rockdale

The town first developed in 1873, as the International-Great Northern Railroad passed through Milan County. Rockdale got its name from a nearby rock that supposedly stood 12 feet high and had a circumference of 20 feet. The City incorporated in 1878. It was the first major railroad town in the County, and became a shipping and supply hub for area farmers.

In the early 1950s, a large Alcoa plant opened and nearly tripled the population in Rockdale within six years. At its heyday, the large Alcoa smelting operation could produce 1.6 million pounds of aluminum per day. Since the almost total closure of the plant in late 2008/early 2009, the population of Rockdale has remained flat with little growth. In 2011, the US Census estimated the population of Rockdale to be 5,572, a slight decline since 2010.

## Why Invest in Downtown?

Revitalization can sometimes be seen as a venture with some level of risk. Typically, investors are more reassured when area governmental entities work to create a more attractive investment climate and assist by also investing in the area. The City's investment in downtown can be reassuring to a private investor and may help encourage them to make the investment.

Moreover, successful downtowns have direct and indirect benefits to the rest of the city. A strong central core is a sign of a strong, healthy city. The long term population growth projections developed by the Texas Water Development Board for the City of Rockdale indicate very slow population growth through the year 2040. By carefully and successfully revitalizing the downtown study area, the entire City of Rockdale could see benefits such as increased tourism, sales tax revenue, population growth, and an increase in property tax revenue.

## RELEVANT PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

The review of previous planning efforts provides an idea of the community's interests based on historical actions and goals identified in these plans. Previous efforts include:

## Comprehensive Plan

The 2002 Comprehensive Plan focused on four main components of the City: thoroughfares, water, wastewater, and drainage. Within the thoroughfare plan section, there are specific recommendations for streets within the downtown study area. It recommends that both Main Street and Ackerman Street become one-way streets and paved to a Class E collector street cross section, which recommends two 12-foot wide traffic lanes, 8-foot wide parking lane, and 4-foot wide sidewalk on each side. This master plan recommends that one-way streets NOT be implemented, since they make access to local businesses more cumbersome and have been shown to limit spontaneous sales. In addition, traffic volumes do not in any way warrant one way streets.

## TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Transportation is more than the movement of motor vehicles. The transportation network should be planned and designed for all modes of transportation including motor vehicles, bicyclists and especially pedestrians. The following is an evaluation of the existing transportation system and how it serves multiple users.

## Vehicular Circulation and Traffic Flow

Currently there are three primary road classifications that exist in the downtown study area: arterials, collectors and local streets. Arterials and collectors are designated as thoroughfares to carry traffic, and as such are designed primarily for this purpose. However, this is often done at the expense of pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

Primary vehicular access to downtown Rockdale is via Cameron Street/Hwy 79. It is a four-lane road with angled parking on both sides through the heart of downtown, then turns into a two-lane road with a center turn lane at the outer edges of the downtown study area. Typical daily traffic volumes along Hwy 79 / Cameron Boulevard are in the 15,000 - 19,000 per day range. More importantly, much of that daily volume is truck traffic which creates uncomfortable conditions for pedestrians and downtown visitors.



Traffic flow of major arterial streets in downtown.

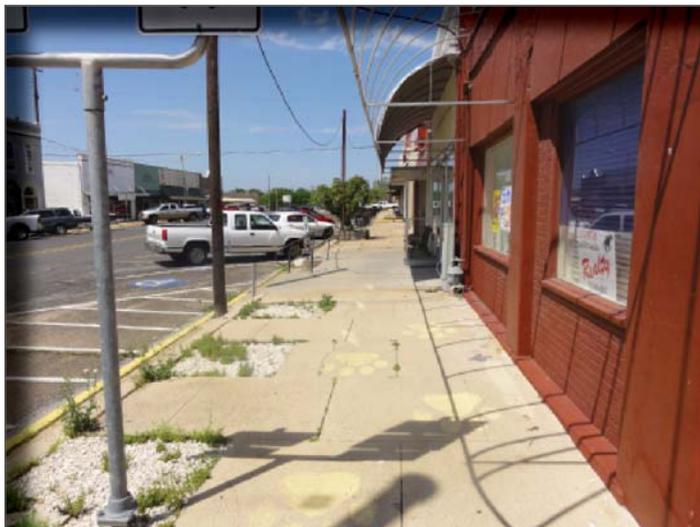


Traffic flow of all streets in downtown.

## Pedestrian Facilities (Sidewalks)

Sidewalk quality varies drastically throughout the study area. Three key issues exist today: sidewalk conditions, inconsistent sidewalk pavement (due to multiple repairs and additions over many years) and the lack of sidewalks in some key areas.

**Condition** - Many sidewalks have significant cracks, pavement condition varies from previous patches and repairs, and handicapped accessibility ramps that were installed in the past two decades are unsightly and are being damaged by parked cars. Leftover sign poles, remnants of prior street tree locations and a lack of attention to removing weeds have created unsightly walking conditions in major parts of the downtown area.



*Patched sidewalks and leftover tree wells in Downtown Rockdale*



*Deteriorating sidewalks and unpainted and potentially unnecessary railings create hazards and an unsightly walking environment*

**Inconsistent pavement** - many additions and improvements over time have resulted in unattractive sections of sidewalk, as shown in the photograph below.



*Uneven sidewalk areas and multiple additions have created unattractive, barren walking areas in downtown Rockdale.*



*Significant height differences from parking to the adjacent sidewalk can create tripping hazards and require frequent railed ramps*

Apart from the condition of existing sidewalks, existing walks do not have streetscape elements such as decorative light poles, benches or street trees that would make the area a more pleasant place to walk. Also, the frequent high step up from on street parking to the adjacent sidewalk creates tripping hazards for less mobile visitors, especially older visitors or children.

**Missing Sidewalk Segments** - Sidewalk connections along Cameron Street from Burleson to Wilcox are missing, and would help connect the western part

of the City back to the downtown area. Other key areas that lack sidewalks include Main Street between Bell and Davila (connecting to the Kay Theater) and undeveloped areas of the downtown along Ackerman, Davila and Bell (near the Kay Theater).



*Pedestrian walking along Cameron Street in an area with no sidewalks*

**Facilities for bicycle riders** - Lastly, there are no striped bicycle lanes or designated bicycle routes in Rockdale. Shared lane markings that let vehicles know that bicycles may be sharing the same road could be added along Milam, Bell and Ackerman Streets. The image on this page illustrates how a shared lane marking works. One bicycle rack for parking bicycles in each block (at least 4 total in the downtown area) would also encourage cyclists to travel to the downtown area on bicycle.



*Shared lane markings help indicate where bicycle riders should ride and alert motorists to the presence of bicyclists*

## On-street Parking and Other Parking Issues

Generally, there is an adequate supply of parking. A total of 350 parking spaces are readily available throughout downtown Rockdale. However, there are no clearly marked off-street public parking lots, and the existing 45 degree angled parking along Cameron Street is difficult to use (and dangerous) because of the higher speed traffic and the difficulty of seeing on-coming traffic to be able to back out.

Few areas exist for off-street parking in the downtown study area. Throughout the public input process, citizens stressed that more parking was a significant



*Angled parking along Cameron Ave/Hwy 79*

need and should be a HIGH priority in the downtown area.

This plan does NOT recommend the removal of existing buildings to add parking. More, not less buildings are needed in the downtown area. However, new parking areas could be built near Wolf Park, adjacent to Antique Queen's, and on the existing Work Force parking lot. Secondly, alley parking for employees and owners should be made available and enforced by the Downtown Association. Employees and business owner cars can be equipped with stickers so that parking in on-street spaces is readily noticeable and can be enforced.

Strong consideration should be given to changing the angled parking spaces to parallel parking along Cameron Street. This would result in the loss of 3 to 5 total spaces, but would create a much safer condition for visitors to downtown Rockdale.

## EXISTING LAND USE

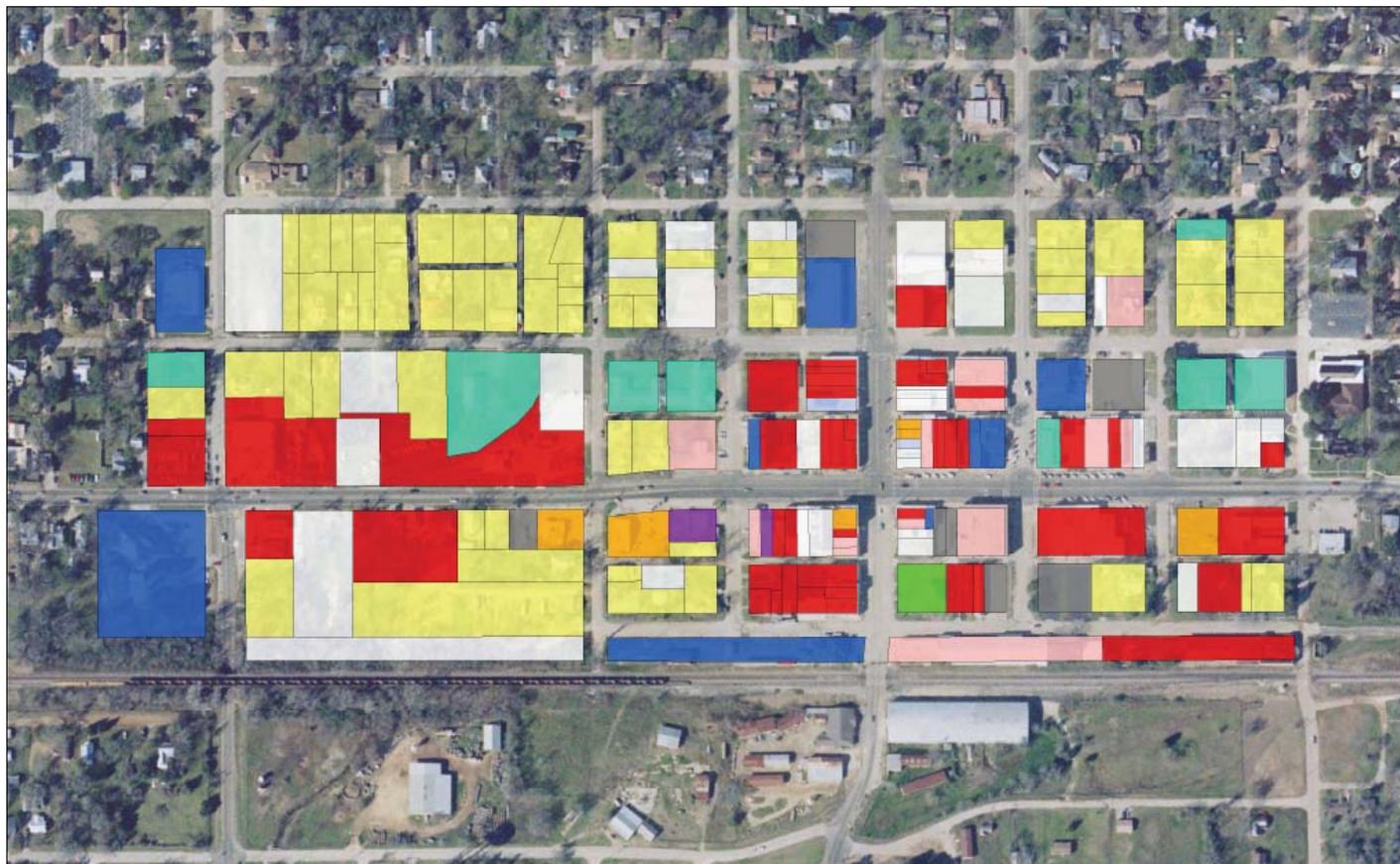
The downtown study area contains a mix of industrial, commercial, cultural, governmental, and residential uses. Field work conducted early in the planning process identified specific building uses for properties in the study area to help identify potential businesses the downtown area could capture.

Currently, the downtown study area makes up approximately 7% of the total appraised value within Rockdale’s city limits. The map on this page illustrates the existing land use.

**Key existing land use factors are as follows:**

- Downtown Rockdale has a varied mix of uses, ranging from governmental, banking, insurance, media (The Rockdale Reporter) and some food establishments and retail.

- Existing residential buildings are remnants of a larger residential base in the area, and are moderately priced. In fact, the area contains some of the most affordable residential tracts in Rockdale. But it also contains multiple older historic buildings which could function well as bed and breakfast establishments.
- There is relatively little green space in the area, except at Wolf Park.
- There are only six land use designated restaurant/ food service properties in the area. A bar/tavern are combined on two of the lots, so there are actually only five restaurant or bar establishments.
- Government and other public buildings such as churches or museums make up approximately 16% of the study area.



 Residential	 Health Care	 Food/Accommodation
 Construction	 Church	 Civic/Government/Museum
 Retail Trade	 Park	 Vacant/Undeveloped
 Professional	 Parking	

## Land Use Analysis - Downtown Rockdale

Land Use Category	Number of Parcels	Acres	% of Total	Developed S.F.	% of Total	Total Market Value	% of Total	Value per SF of Building or Land	Rank (Value per SF)
Residential	61	13.01	34%	89,300	19%	\$2,586,800	21%	\$28.97	4
Financial Services, Insurance, Title Services	9	2.00	5%	59,576	12%	\$1,146,300	9%	\$19.24	7
Unassigned	21	3.07	8%	50,450	11%	\$911,840	7%	\$18.07	9
Churches	5	1.68	4%	48,100	10%	\$2,603,200	21%	\$54.12	1
Governmental	9	4.6	12%	46,860	10%	\$2,021,500	16%	\$42.94	2
Retail	7	1.25	3%	42,639	9%	\$652,500	5%	\$15.30	10
Automotive Sales, Repairs, Fuel Sales	7	1.32	3%	34,361	7%	\$696,000	6%	\$20.26	5
Commercial (including Monument sales)	4	1.54	4%	30,461	6%	\$146,800	1%	\$4.82	12
Vacant	10	1.18	3%	24,790	5%	\$264,600	2%	\$10.67	11
General Services (Plumbing, Pest, Media, etc.)	8	1.1	3%	19,121	4%	\$361,200	3%	\$18.89	8
Parking	7	1.36	4%	14,838	3%	\$115,800	1%	\$1.83	
Food Related Sales	6	0.95	2%	13,400	3%	\$469,300	4%	\$35.02	3
Medical Services (Massage Therapy, Optical)	2	0.12	0%	3,184	1%	\$62,600	1%	\$19.66	6
Recreation Usage (Wolf)	1	0.26	1%	1,200	0%	\$38,700	0%	\$0.00	NA
Undeveloped	23	4.66	12%	540	0%	\$204,700	2%	\$1.01	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>38.10</b>		<b>478,820</b>		<b>\$12,281,840</b>		<b>\$17.27</b>	

## LAND USE TYPES AND AREA MARKET VALUE

The table shown on this page was derived from Milam County Appraisal District information for the 2011 tax year. Excluding street rights of way in the downtown area, the area contains approximately 38 acres, close to 500,000 square feet of buildings, and an overall value of \$12.3 million dollars. Key findings are as follows:

- 12% of the downtown area is considered undeveloped or vacant. These include the Kay Theater that is being renovated. Few large undeveloped tracts exist in the area, with the exception of lots adjacent to the Kay Theater.
- Properties that do not contribute to the area's taxable base (governmental and churches) make up 37% of the value of the area and 16% of its land area. But these encourage visits to the downtown area and should be maintained.
- Parking is 4% of the overall area, a relatively small percentage.
- Food related uses are only 3% of the building area, a very small percentage.
- General commercial uses, including monument sales, comprise a very small percentage of the value of the area, and yet occupy high visibility sites along Cameron Avenue.
- Financial services, insurance and professional title services make up a significant portion of the building area and contribute significantly to the overall value of the area.
- The calculation of per square foot building value on a per square foot basis results in interesting findings. Beyond churches and governmental buildings, food related uses, auto related businesses, medical services, and financial services provide the highest values on a per square foot basis. While this depends on the buildings they occupy, it also indicates that these types of uses may be the most desirable to stabilize property values in the downtown area.
- No hotel or lodging uses occur in the downtown area. Several large residential buildings could accommodate a downtown bed and breakfast.
- Retail uses, including antique sales, only account for 9% of the downtown area. Additional retail should be targeted to move into the area.

## Building Condition and Appearance

Buildings in the downtown study area range in age from 10 years to over 75 years old. Because of damage over the years, many of the original buildings found in the downtown area have been replaced with newer buildings. There have been no significant building design guidelines in place, and many of the replacement buildings have simply served as quick nondescript structures, or have been painted in colors that do not fit in with adjacent structures.

However, a surprisingly large stock of older buildings remain. Many of these are experiencing roof and mechanical/electrical concerns, and are in danger of deteriorating to the point that they have to be removed. The recent collapse of the roof of a building along Cameron Avenue emphasizes this point: vertical structures areas remain the single most important asset of the downtown, and must be preserved.

One story commercial buildings are the most prevalent in the area. Building structures range from wooden structures, metal buildings, plain brick masonry, or concrete block buildings. Preferred styles of buildings are shown on this page.

Buildings in a downtown environment are a key form giver to the area. Buildings should be close to the main pedestrian corridors to encourage walking. Open areas between buildings, such as parking lots, become potential “dead” space with no interest for pedestrians.

The character of buildings should also contribute to the interest in Rockdale’s downtown. Having multi-story buildings can contribute to the appeal of a downtown street. Window detailing, awnings, roofline detailing and large storefront windows all create interest in the downtown area.



*Downtown buildings shown on this page illustrate a typical downtown character that should be maintained. Even the Orsag’s Building, while paint covers much of the original detailing, retains potential to be an important part of the downtown area.*

## VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

The vision of the Rockdale Downtown Master Plan is to make downtown an appealing destination to Rockdale's citizens and visitors of all ages. At the same time, the history and character of the neighborhoods that make up the study area should be preserved and even enhanced. Therefore, three broad goals were created for downtown.

### Create a Sense of Community

Building and reinforcing a sense of community is important in the success of downtown. The quality and livability of a place is impacted by activity in the area. Community is a support system, providing individuals with a sense of identity, connectedness, and belonging. Without a sense of community, individuals can feel disconnected and lonely, leading to social disintegration.

A sense of community is more than just the existence of a community. It should be visible and sensed in order to benefit the society. Activities and events help make that community more visible and give individuals an opportunity to be involved. Efforts to expand and promote existing events should be made to strengthen the sense of community in downtown.



*Coppell Town Center*



*Austin Farmer's Market in downtown Austin*

### Create a Sense of Place

"Sense of Place" describes the characteristics of a place that make it special or unique. Places with a strong sense of place have a strong identity. This is created through a variety of ways: public activity, land uses, building quality, architecture, cleanliness, and safety just to name a few.

Research by the Project for Public Spaces has led to the development of a model of qualities that create great places. Their evaluation of thousands of



*Millennium Park in Chicago*

public spaces around the world has found that there are four key qualities for a successful place: the space is accessible; people are engaged in activities there; it is a comfortable space with a safe image; and it is a sociable place where people can meet each other.



*Model of qualities that create great public places by the Project for Public Spaces.*

### Create a Sense of Value

People often express value with attention and money. A place is valued in the same way: through visitation and investment. During the booming 1950s and 1960s, downtowns were a place full of value. Property owners found value in investing their money in downtown, businesses found value in operating

in downtown, and people found value in visiting downtown.

Today, there is less sense of value apparent in downtown Rockdale. Activity is limited to business hours, and even during those hours activity tends to happen within buildings only. There is some desire for private investment in the downtown area as evidenced by the extensive investment made for Elements, but not as much evidence of governmental support or investment. This needs to change.

Over time, businesses have abandoned the area either because of a lack of activity or because there are better, more “valuable” places to operate. Simple needs such as easy access and parking, nearby places to eat lunch and higher visibility have made the western portions of Hwy 79 in Rockdale a more attractive place to be.

This master plan seeks to revitalize downtown and restore the sense of value that once existed here.



*Historic image of Cameron Avenue in downtown Rockdale  
(Photo provided by the Rockdale Municipal Development District)*



## Chapter 2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

**“Building a sense of community requires fostering a sense of connection among citizens and developing a sense of civic pride. Open communication and networking are key ingredients in fostering a sense of community. It also takes involved citizens. A sense of community involves joining together to work on community issues, celebrate, listen, vision, plan, problem solve, and make decisions.”**

~Mary Walsh, Building Citizen Involvement

# PURPOSE OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The development of the Downtown Master Plan could not have been completed without the participation and input of the downtown stakeholders and residents of Rockdale. A combination of surveys, workshops with the Rockdale Downtown Association, and a public meeting allowed interested citizens of Rockdale to participate in the planning process. Through these meetings, we identified issues, opportunities and desires of both businesses, elected officials and Rockdale citizens regarding downtown.

## SURVEY RESULTS

Multiple surveys were distributed seeking input for the downtown plan. Initially, an intercept survey was conducted during the Annual Tejas Book Festival and Car Show in March of 2012. The second survey was sent to business owners in downtown, asking for their opinions on ways the downtown area can be improved to benefit their business. The third survey was for the customers of the downtown area shops, asking why they visit downtown and what would bring them to the area more often. The final survey was available online to all residents of Rockdale, asking for general opinions about downtown. The results of each survey are discussed in more detail on the following pages.

### Car Show and Tejas Book Festival Intercept Survey

A total of 70 surveys were filled out and returned at the Tejas Art & Book Festival and Annual Auto & Bike Show on March 3rd, 2012 in downtown Rockdale. Below is a summary of the responses of that survey.

#### Are you a resident of Rockdale, or visitor?

- 60% of surveys received were from residents near or in Rockdale
- 20% of surveys were from residents of other areas of Milam County
- 18.6% of surveys received were from residents outside of Milam County

#### Attended the Car Show/Book Festival event before?

- 63% of respondents had attended the event before and 31% had not

#### How did you hear about the event?

- A large majority of those surveyed heard about the event through a local media source, including newspaper or radio (38.6%) or through an organization or business entity (18.5%)
- Other forms of publicity that drew attendance included school promotion; mail out; and walk or drive by

#### How often do you come to Downtown Rockdale?

- 67% of the survey respondents said they come to Rockdale at least once a week. Of these 47 respondents, 37 (78.7%) are from the city or immediate vicinity and 17% were from Milam County (outside of the near-city area)

#### Normally, what is your reason for visiting downtown Rockdale?

- The top reasons for typically visiting Rockdale include (in order) shopping; eating out; attending a special event/festival; visiting a business
- *Only 1 survey respondent* answered that they normally come to downtown Rockdale to visit the museum



*Public visioning meeting held in May 2012 to address economic development, including the downtown study area.*



*Car Show attendees completing the intercept survey in March 2012*

**What would make you visit downtown Rockdale more frequently?**

- Festivals or special events: 48.6%
- More places to eat: 45.7%
- Different shops: 44.3%
- More entertainment or music venues: 40%
- Public gathering places (parks or plazas): 28.6%
- Promotions to attract you to downtown: 21.4%

**What do you LIKE about downtown Rockdale?**

- Character or feeling of downtown Rockdale (referring to the hometown/small town feel) (28.6%)
- People (22.9%)
- Variety of businesses (15.7%)
- Other answers that received repetitive responses include events, the cleanliness, specific businesses, museums, the preservation of buildings, and the library

**What do you NOT like about downtown Rockdale?**

- Lack of destination/things to do (12 responses)
- Infrastructure (including quality and ease of it) (7)
- Traffic through downtown (4)
- Other answers include building conditions; no promotion; condition of entrance; police trap; Walmart better place to go; not clean

**Suggestions to improve downtown Rockdale?**

- Fill empty businesses/attract businesses (8)
- Improve quality of built environment/clean up vacant properties (3)
- Family/youth activity opportunities (3)
- Other answers include art district; water feature; housing; common theme; parking; parade; traffic; Christmas decorations; walk/bike path

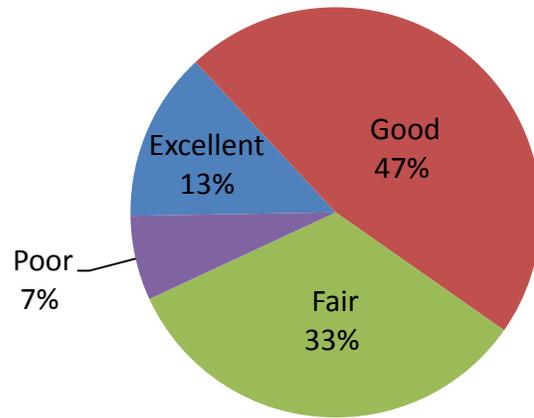
**Business Owner Survey**

Detailed surveys were distributed to businesses in the downtown area. 17 surveys were completed, with the following results:

60% of the business owners in Downtown Rockdale would rate that it is either a good or excellent place to do business. However, only 13% would rate it as excellent.

Similarly, 66% of responding business owners would rate access to parking for their business as either good or excellent. This actually conflicts with other public input that was received where residents voiced that

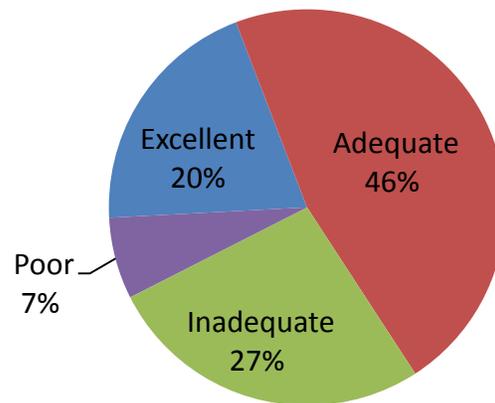
**Overall, how would you rate downtown Rockdale as a place to do business?**



no available parking was a major complaint of the downtown area.

Business owners were given a list of potential advantages to their location in Rockdale. The most common advantages are being located close to the

**How would you rate access to parking for your business?**



highways and having access to the highways. The top five most common advantages are:

- Cost of doing business (53%)
- Location next to/near highway (53%)
- Proximity to Taylor (53%)
- Access to area highways (47%)
- Cost to rent/lease space (47%)

Business owner respondents were also asked what do they feel are the challenges facing their business in downtown. The response that received the highest amount of agreement was current economic conditions, with 73% of business owners indicating this was a challenge. The most common cited challenges are:

- Current economic conditions (73%)
- Insufficient customer base/sales (60%)

- Property or space constraints (27%)
- Codes or regulations (20%)
- Transportation/parking access (20%)
- Facade improvements (20%)

Nearly three-fourths of the business owner respondents in downtown feel that their business has been stable over the past 12 months. Only 13% feel business is moderately growing, while 13% feel that business is declining.

Business owners were given different options which potentially could grow their business. They were then asked which of the options they felt would help them. The number one response was attractiveness of Downtown Rockdale. The top five most common



options that would help businesses grow and succeed are:

- Attractiveness of Downtown Rockdale (67%)
- Increase in customer base (60%)
- More customer parking near business (33%)
- Improved safety in Downtown Rockdale (27%)
- Information on business planning/marketing (27%)
- Financing assistance (27%)

Two thirds of all business respondents were members of the Rockdale Downtown Association, and two thirds were members of the Rockdale Chamber of Commerce. Fully one third were not members of either.

## Rockdale Customer Questionnaire

A total of 23 customer surveys were completed. Of the customers who completed the very brief customer questionnaire, 75% were from Rockdale, 10% were from elsewhere in Milam County, and 15% were from outside Milam County. The primary reasons for their visit were:

- Visit a certain business (67%)
- General shopping (24%)
- Visit a friend (19%)
- Visit the library (14%)
- Just passing through (10%)
- Work downtown (10%)

Reasons for typically visiting the downtown area included:

- Eating out (57%)
- Shopping (57%)
- Visit a business (38%)
- Other (38%)
- Attend a festival or special event (33%)

When customers were asked what types of businesses or attractions would make them visit downtown more frequently, over three-fourths of the respondents indicated more places to eat. The top answers are:

- More places to eat (76%)
- More places to shop (57%)
- Different shops (52%)
- Festivals or special events (48%)
- Entertainment venues (48%)

## Citywide Opinion Survey

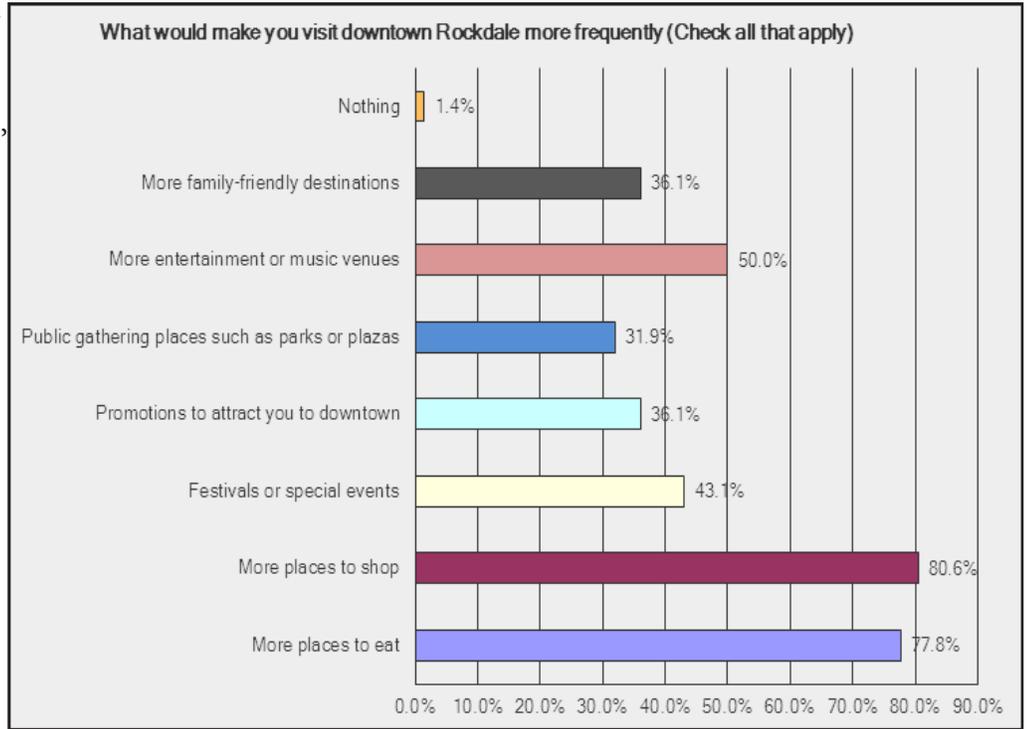
The citywide opinion survey was available online for all residents of Rockdale to give their opinions of downtown, and a total of 52 were received. Almost three-fourths (74%) indicated that they visit downtown several times a week. 9% indicated they visit once per week, 5% indicated they visit once per month, and 12% indicated they visit very seldomly.

When asked why they visit downtown Rockdale, the number one response was to visit a specific business. The top answers are listed below.

- Visit a specific business (68%)
- Attend a festival or special event (44%)
- Shop (42%)
- Eat out (28%)
- Visit the library (27%)

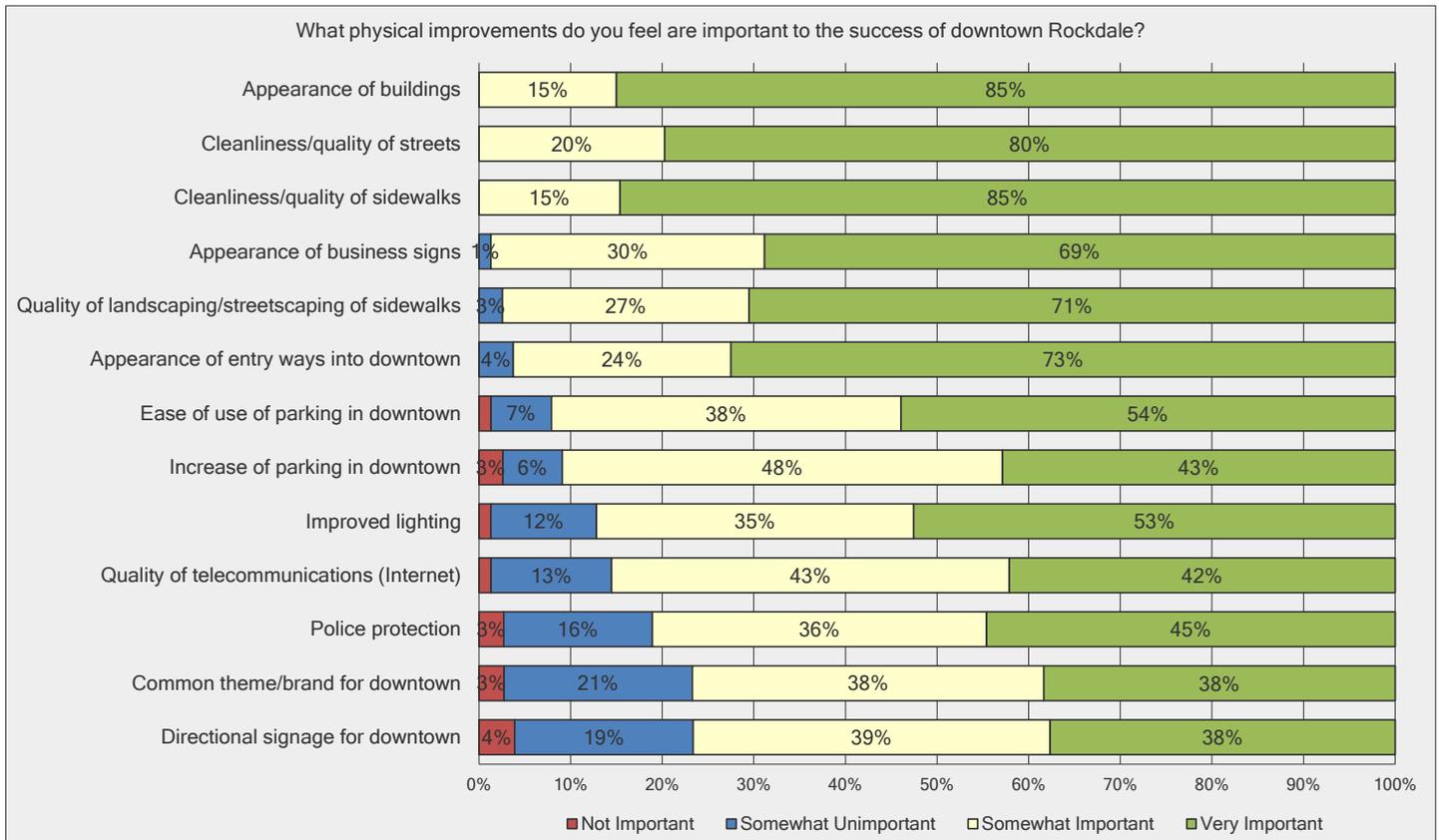
Citizens were also asked what would make them visit downtown more frequently. Similar to the results found in the customer questionnaire, the number one response was more places to eat. The top answers are:

- More places to eat (76%)
- More entertainment or music venues (51%)
- Festivals/special events (45%)
- More places to shop (41%)
- Promotions to attract you to downtown (38%)
- More family-friendly destinations (36%)
- Public gathering places such as parks/plazas (31%)



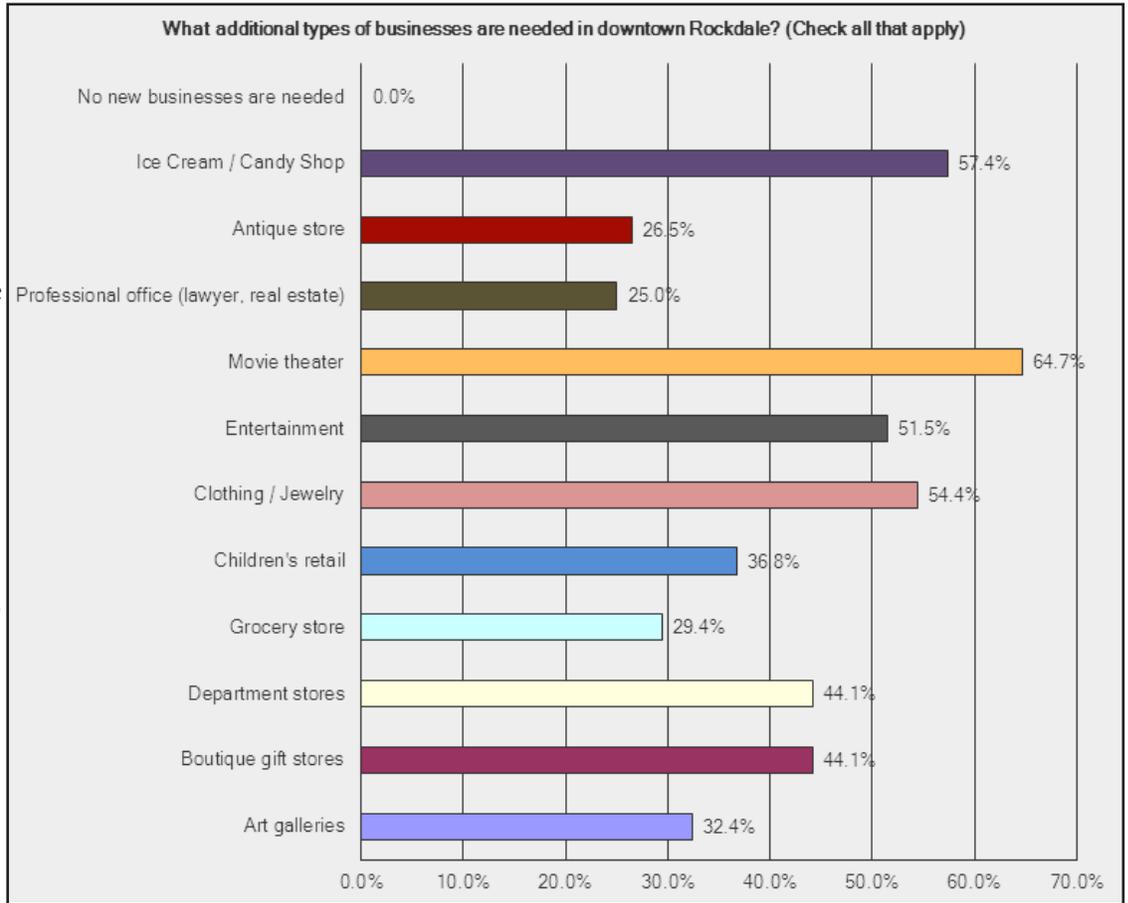
Residents were given a list of potential improvements for downtown, and asked which improvement they felt were important to the success of downtown. The answers are shown in the graph below. The top three responses that 100% of survey respondents agreed were very important or somewhat important were:

- Improve the appearance of buildings (76%)
- Improve the cleanliness and quality of streets (51%)
- Improve the cleanliness and quality of sidewalks



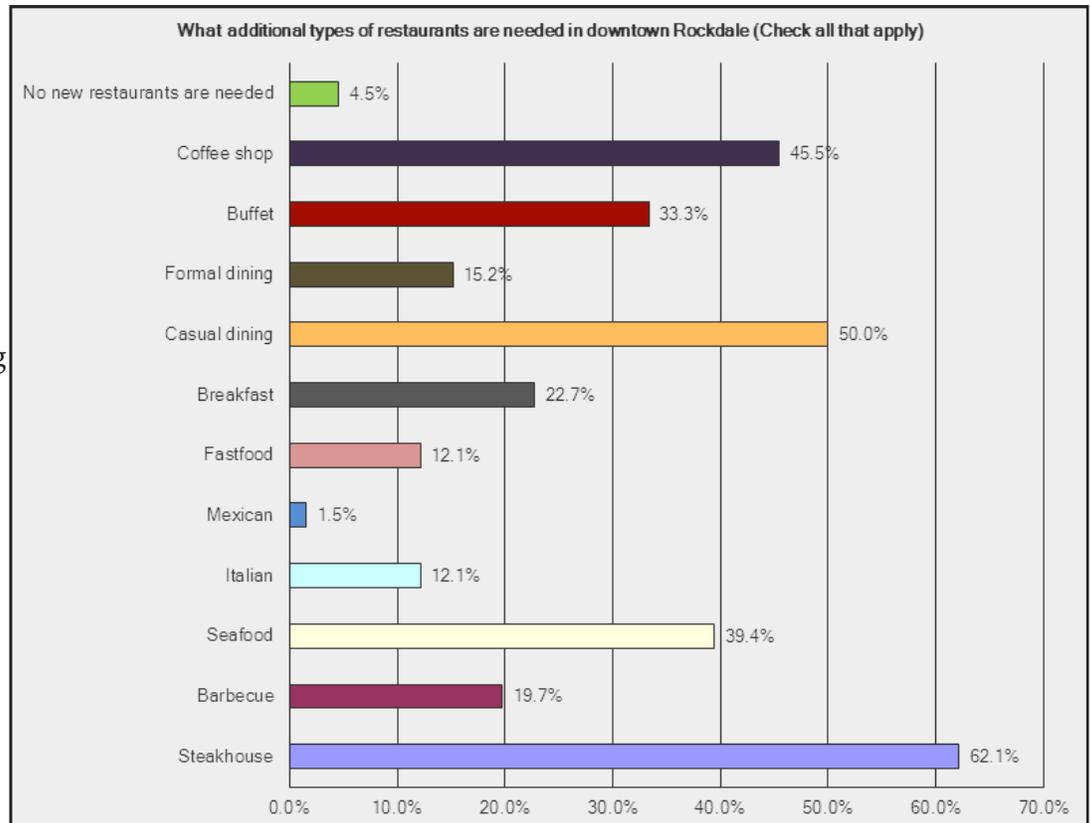
Residents of Rockdale were asked what type of businesses they think are needed in the downtown area. The top three responses that received over 50% of the response rate were movie theater, ice cream/candy shop, and clothing/jewelry store. The top answers are listed below; all answers are on the adjacent chart.

- Movie theater (65%)
- Ice cream/candy shop (55%)
- Clothing/jewelry store (54%)
- Entertainment (49%)
- Boutique gift stores (43%)
- Department stores (42%)



Similarly, residents were also asked what type of restaurants they think are needed in downtown. The number one response was a steakhouse; however, only 58% of respondents felt this a need. The top answers are listed below; detailed answers are on the following chart.

- Steakhouse (58%)
- Casual dining (47%)
- Coffee shop (46%)
- Seafood (39%)
- Buffet (30%)



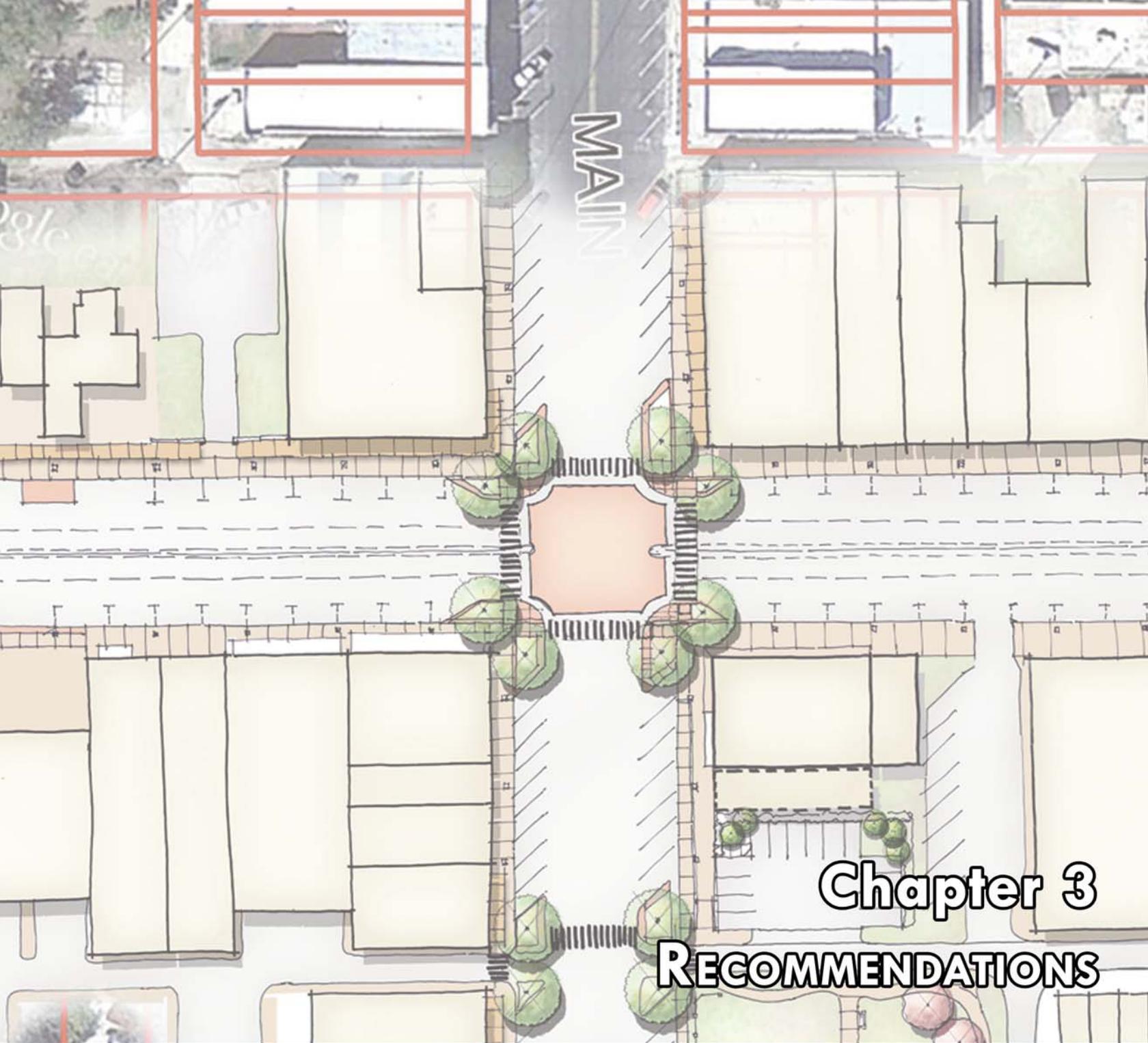
## PUBLIC VISIONING MEETING

A public meeting was held in May 2012, to discuss economic development opportunities in Rockdale, and downtown was one key component during this process. During the open house portion of the public meeting, residents were shown potential improvements that could be made to downtown. They were asked to give their feedback as to which improvements they supported. The improvements are ranked below based on the amount of support received.

1. Grant program to help renovate building facades
2. Improve sidewalks throughout downtown
3. Improve gateways into downtown
4. Complete the Kay Theatre renovation and area around it
5. Step up regulatory enforcement
6. Add a median on Camoron Ave. and adjust parking
7. Create additional visitor and customer parking lots
8. Help new businesses get started in downtown area
9. Add more downtown murals and public art
10. Enhance Wolf Park as an every day downtown destination



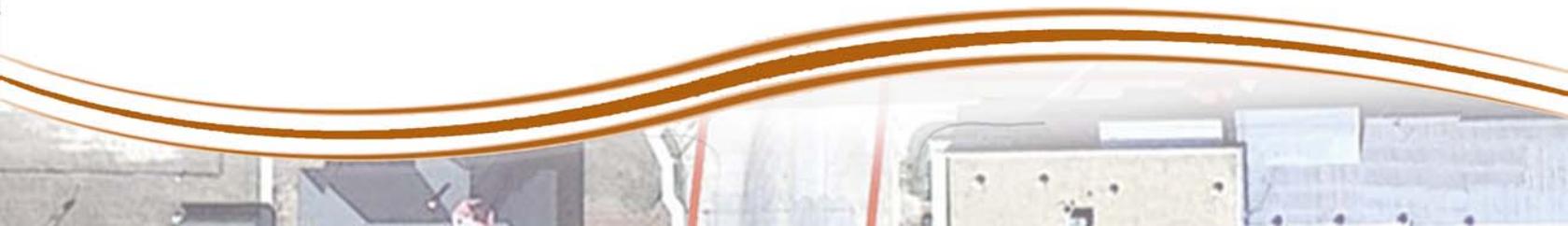
*Public visioning meeting held in May 2012 to address economic development, including the downtown study area.*



## Chapter 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

**“Planning cannot guarantee the outcome you want. Instead, it can help you achieve something integral to any future success: readiness to face the challenges that chance presents.”**

~Arlene Goldbard, writer and consultant



# MARKET REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following summarizes the key findings of CDS / Spillette after spending time with community and business leaders in Rockdale as well as performing secondary research and analysis. Strategic recommendations based on our findings are located at the conclusion of this document.

## Community Leader Meetings and Roundtable

CDS | Spillette met and had a series of meetings with the Rockdale community leaders and business owners on July 19, 2012. The principal points raised during the group meetings included the following:

### 1. Real estate and downtown conditions:

- Little change in last 10 years
- Several businesses have closed down after Alcoa workforce reduction
- Downtown building owners charge relatively high rent, utilities are high also
- Most downtown buildings need substantial repairs, especially roofs
- Little pressure on downtown building owners for building sales or increasing occupancy
- Estimated vacancy: 20% residential (all over town), 25% commercial, higher in downtown
- Very little residential rental in Rockdale
- Antique stores locate in Caldwell and Giddings because rent is lower
- Business mix – 5 insurance offices, two antique stores, few churches
- Most businesses rent their space
- There are people that reportedly want to buy some of the buildings in downtown but asking prices are high relative to the amount of repairs the buildings require

### 2. Shopping / dining:

- No one shops / eats in downtown
- No successful dining in downtown for decades
- Cliff's – draws mainly Rockdale locals, open at night only
- Antique Queens draws non-locals
- Residents go to Georgetown, Round Rock, Austin, Bryan - College Station to shop
- Orsag's Furniture and Appliances – closed due to lack

- of business, outlet in Giddings is still open
- Rockdale HEB closed, one in Taylor expanded
- Walmart opening in Rockdale was a significant economic event; it is the only one in the county

### 3. Overall economy and demographic:

- At peak, 40% of 1,700 Alcoa employees lived in Rockdale
- There used to be a management philosophy at Alcoa that management needed to live in Rockdale and be involved in the community. This changed in the 1990's when Alcoa executives quit living in Rockdale during 1990s and chose to live closer to Austin
- Alcoa no longer an economic asset – still has large land holdings around plant, some rail-served
- Better-off households and business tilted toward west side of town
- Some business failures post-Alcoa
- Very much a company town, low entrepreneurship rate
- Sales tax starting to bounce back after bottoming out 18 months ago
- Luminant plant – outages bring in business from temp workers
- Average wages dropped post-Alcoa
- Hotels doing worse since Alcoa layoffs
- Water quality is negative for attracting business and residents
- Local banks very conservative with lending
- City and Chamber own 100+ acres 1.5 miles off of US 79
- Senior living project near US 79 and US 77 - \$9.5 million, 80 units
- Local health care is good
- Home sales slow

### 4. Roads and highways

- TxDOT has loop proposal for northern part of town
- Traffic counts – US 79 17,000, US 77 much lower
- Traffic design on US 79 makes vehicles go too fast through downtown
- Parallel vs. diagonal parking

### 5. Events:

- Three major in-town events: Car show / Tejas (March), Homecoming parade, Rockdale Fair; smaller events include a July tennis tournament, a Christmas parade, and 5K runs
- Nocturnal Wonderland – 2 nights, twice/year at

Apache Pass

- Trade Days starting – late October, countywide on El Camino Real

#### **6. Civic and quality of life:**

- Lack of recreational activities for children/families
- Kay Theatre – envisioned primarily as live performance space, could also show movies
- Lack of civic engagement and complacency are an issue
- Fair Park and community center are under-utilized

#### **7. Current and potential downtown improvement initiatives:**

- Façade grants - \$30K budget, max grant \$10K
- Should MDD buy downtown building, rehab, create business incubator?

## **Interviews with Selected Businesses**

### **Elements**

1. Business partners were originally from Rockdale
2. Bought building 2009, rehabbed; 2-story, 1,400 sq.ft. down
3. Principal sales from clothing, also gifts, home accessories, art
4. Only 1 employee - Wendie
5. Would like to renovate upstairs as apartment or more retail
6. Advantages to Rockdale – lots of spending capacity in area with no place to shop
7. Disadvantages – generating visits (but 75% of visitors buy)
8. Biggest business opportunity in Rockdale – lunch place for women passing through
9. Biggest challenges – water quality, perceived drug problems
10. Existing physical conditions in downtown – city finally gave waivers on permits and helped fix sidewalks sidewalk
11. Customer base is 85% local
12. Rockdale residents mostly visit / shop in Austin, Bryan – College Station, Taylor, Temple
13. To improve downtown, city should enforce ordinances and make aesthetic improvements

### **Perry & Perry**

1. Started business 1974, moved downtown early 2000s
2. Business – miscellaneous steel erection
3. 60 total employees, approx. 20 in Rockdale

4. Building is family-owned
5. May do something with space next door
6. Advantages to downtown Rockdale – walk to services
7. Disadvantages – traffic noise (trucks)
8. Biggest opportunity in downtown – underutilized property across the street could be used for nice events
9. Need fitness club / YMCA
10. Biggest challenges – age and condition of buildings, lost jobs from Alcoa
11. Hurdles for downtown – unemployment, narrowing of US 79 with Alcoa and Luminant truck traffic, high water problems at cross streets
12. Downtown buildings condition – lots of vacancy, many buildings too deteriorated to save, parking
13. Rockdale residents have to leave town for many retail and service needs
14. Most visitors to Rockdale already have a tie to the town
15. Vision for future – more activities for children / students, open day care on Saturdays and evenings
16. Needed retail / services in town – evening health care, Beall's
17. Impact of Alcoa layoffs – HEB closed, impact was slow due to exit benefits, now more commuters to Austin and Round Rock
18. To improve downtown, more historical renovation, attractions to bring visitors, children's museum

### **Antique Queens**

1. Antique Queens has succeeded while other antique stores in the area have had more difficulty
2. Downtown building owners won't sell the buildings for good prices and the rent is too high
3. They would love to have a nice restaurant downtown like the Longhorn Steakhouse that used to be downtown
4. The owners of Antique Queens work very hard to make their business succeed
5. There has been significant interest expressed in their shop by other potential antique vendors (stall tenants) but they do not have space
6. Antique Queens really depends on some locals but primarily out of town traffic for clientele
7. Cities cited as competition for Rockdale for shoppers include Brenham, Giddings, Round Top, Salado, and Georgetown
8. They do not perceive that the market is saturated for such destinations – people are always looking for

new places to go

9. One opportunity they see is a tearoom – many Antique Queens customers ask where they can go eat
10. Location along the highway is crucial, they feel that being one block off of the highway would decrease their business
11. They would like to work with other shops in Rockdale to rent a billboard with a Shop in Rockdale message
12. Existing business owners feel that the city favors new businesses over existing business in terms of policy regarding incentives and code enforcement
13. They have witnessed a large drop off in business for all service businesses since Alcoa
14. Opening of Walmart had as large an impact on downtown as Alcoa
15. Mismatch of tenants; there should be a focus of retail along Cameron Avenue
16. Traffic and lack of a downtown café are the two largest problems in downtown
17. The City or merchants should get signage to better utilize the side streets.

## Economic and Demographic Trends

An analysis of the demographic and economic trends for the Rockdale area available through public data sources does not indicate significantly growing support for additional development, in downtown or

otherwise.

Table 1 on the next page provides population by age and households by income from Census Bureau counts and estimates. Key points are as follows:

- In contrast to the rapid statewide population and household count increases, Rockdale and Milam County experienced very little change from 2000 to 2010.
- The age group with the greatest change was that encompassing middle aged and older “empty nesters” between the ages of 45 and 64, which increased by approximately 1,200 at the county level. This does not necessarily mean in-migration; it may have been an existing population cohort aging.
- Rockdale and Milam County have relatively large shares of households at very low incomes. In Rockdale especially the number of households earning from \$15,000 to \$24,999 grew substantially from 2000 to 2010 while those earning \$25,000 to \$49,999 declined significantly. This may represent the main positions affected by the Alcoa layoffs.
- The median household income, adjusted for inflation, fell substantially in Rockdale during the 10-year period. It fell less severely in Milam, but the statewide figure shows little change at all.



*Interior of Antique Queens located on Cameron Avenue*

Table 1: Demographic Trends

Census / ACS Measurement	2000				2010				Change 2000 - 2010			
	Rockdale city, TX	Rockdale ISD	Milam County, TX	Texas	Rockdale city, TX	Rockdale ISD	Milam County, TX	Texas	Rockdale city, TX	Rockdale ISD	Milam County, TX	Texas
<b>TOTAL POPULATION<sup>1</sup></b>	5,439	9,220	24,238	20,851,820	5,595	9,036	24,757	25,145,561	156	-184	519	4,293,741
<b>AGE GROUPS<sup>1</sup></b>												
Age 0 to 4	465	699	1,654	1,624,628	445	642	1,698	1,928,473	-20	-57	44	303,845
Age 5 to 9	446	740	1,822	1,654,184	413	647	1,806	1,928,234	-33	-93	-16	274,050
Age 10 to 14	398	729	1,909	1,631,192	448	694	1,797	1,881,883	50	-35	-112	250,691
Age 15 to 24	684	1,194	3,146	3,175,636	727	1,137	3,024	3,700,203	43	-57	-122	524,567
Age 25 to 34	647	1,042	2,611	3,162,083	658	964	2,560	3,613,473	11	-78	-51	451,390
Age 35 to 44	694	1,264	3,370	3,322,238	643	1,040	2,800	3,458,382	-51	-224	-570	136,144
Age 45 to 54	620	1,172	3,078	2,611,137	717	1,272	3,506	3,435,336	97	100	428	824,199
Age 55 to 64	448	881	2,475	1,598,190	600	1,131	3,261	2,597,691	152	250	786	999,501
Age 65 to 74	462	753	2,013	1,142,608	418	758	2,263	1,472,256	-44	5	250	329,648
Age 75 to 84	414	544	1,549	691,984	339	523	1,441	824,451	-75	-21	-108	132,467
Age 85 and over	161	203	611	237,940	187	227	601	305,179	26	24	-10	67,239
<b>TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS<sup>2</sup></b>	2,077	3,460	9,199	7,393,354	2,174	3,455	9,526	8,666,138	97	-5	327	1,272,784
<b>HOUSEHOLD INCOME GROUPS<sup>2</sup></b>												
Less than \$15,000	449	668	2,075	1,258,659	480	587	1,445	1,161,263	31	-81	-630	-97,396
\$15,000 to \$24,999	269	430	1,380	1,004,123	513	656	1,550	1,005,272	244	226	170	1,149
\$25,000 to \$34,999	342	549	1,337	996,141	235	369	1,302	953,275	-107	-180	-35	-42,866
\$35,000 to \$49,999	393	689	1,641	1,219,358	189	362	1,369	1,239,258	-204	-327	-272	19,900
\$50,000 to \$74,999	396	674	1,646	1,359,437	343	607	1,550	1,577,237	-53	-67	-96	217,800
\$75,000 to \$99,999	111	255	615	705,684	154	456	1,150	1,005,272	43	201	535	299,588
\$100,000 to \$149,999	95	147	324	536,018	226	273	808	1,013,938	131	126	484	477,920
\$150,000 or more	38	47	167	317,874	34	145	352	710,623	-4	98	185	392,749
<b>Median Household Income<sup>3</sup></b>	\$44,851	\$47,705	\$43,429	\$52,374	\$33,031	\$41,493	\$42,161	\$52,260	-\$11,820	-\$6,212	-\$1,268	-\$113

<sup>1</sup> Sources: 2000 and 2010 Census.

<sup>2</sup> Sources: 2000 Census, 2010 3-Year American Community Survey (Milam County and Texas), 2010 5-Year American Community Survey (City of Rockdale and Rockdale ISD)

<sup>3</sup> Sources: 2000 Census, 2010 3-Year American Community Survey (Milam County and Texas), 2010 5-Year American Community Survey (City of Rockdale and Rockdale ISD); all figures adjusted to 2011 dollars.

Table 2 on the following page provides an idea of housing development trends around Rockdale, based on Census bureau estimates. Little housing development has occurred in the Rockdale area in recent years, so the share of homes built since 1990 trails the state total overall. The age of housing in Rockdale especially is dominated by structures built between 1950 and 1989; 75% of all housing units in the city were built during this period. Statewide, 36% of housing units were built since 1990, while the share of such homes in Rockdale was just 11%. This period represents the time when Alcoa was a strong anchor and growth mechanism for the local economy.

**Table 2: Housing Age of Construction**

Housing Age Group	Estimated Number				Share			
	Rockdale city, Texas <sup>1</sup>	Rockdale ISD	Milam County <sup>2</sup>	Texas <sup>2</sup>	Rockdale city, Texas <sup>1</sup>	Rockdale ISD	Milam County <sup>2</sup>	Texas <sup>2</sup>
Total Housing Units	2,494	4,051	11,301	9,888,117	100%	100%	100%	100%
Built 2005 or later	65	108	515	821,424	3%	3%	5%	8%
Built 2000 to 2004	19	219	578	1,177,278	1%	5%	5%	12%
Built 1990 to 1999	180	368	1,514	1,555,557	7%	9%	13%	16%
Built 1980 to 1989	381	690	1,565	1,781,682	15%	17%	14%	18%
Built 1970 to 1979	547	867	1,882	1,770,916	22%	21%	17%	18%
Built 1960 to 1969	404	535	1,271	1,016,756	16%	13%	11%	10%
Built 1950 to 1959	552	673	2,132	911,900	22%	17%	19%	9%
Built 1940 to 1949	239	291	673	408,183	10%	7%	6%	4%
Built 1939 or earlier	107	300	1,171	444,421	4%	7%	10%	4%

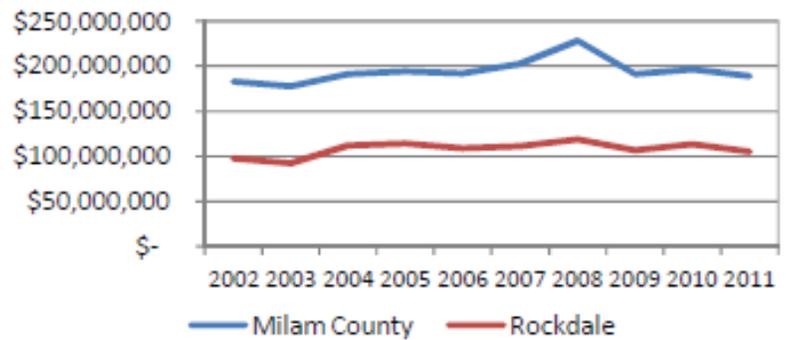
<sup>1</sup> 2010 5-Year American Community Survey

<sup>2</sup> 2010 3-Year American Community Survey

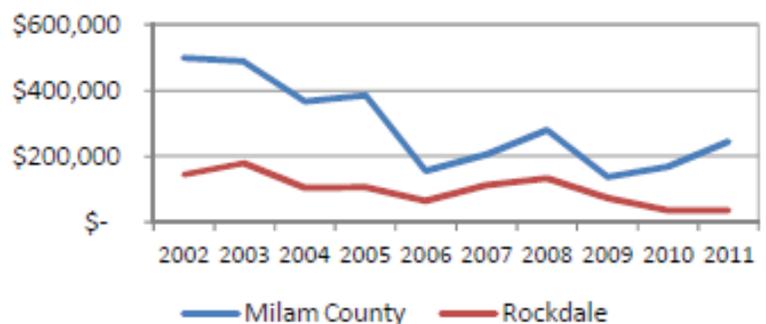
The charts to the right provide an overview of retail spending trends in Rockdale and Milam County. Figure 1 shows that total spending in establishments which typically occupy retail space has remained flat since 2002, when adjusted for inflation. Most worrisome is a decline from 2010 to 2011, when this should have been a period of economic recovery from the recession.

In Figure 2, the data show that spending at Clothing and Accessories stores has been following a general downward trend, though there has been an increase at the county level since 2009. Note that the total spending volume is very low in the category; it is possible that a large share of clothing and accessories purchases happen at General Merchandise stores such as Walmart.

**Figure 1: Retail Trade and Related Sales**



**Figure 2: Clothing and Accessories Stores**



As with Clothing and Accessories, Furniture and Home Furnishings stores in the area have been recording declining sales as well, as shown in Figure 3.

Spending at Food Service and Drinking Places (restaurants and bars) actually showed slow increase from 2005 through 2008, but has been dropping steadily since the recession.

In summary, the stagnant population and declining incomes shown the Census Bureau data appear to be aligned with the findings of the retail spending data analysis.

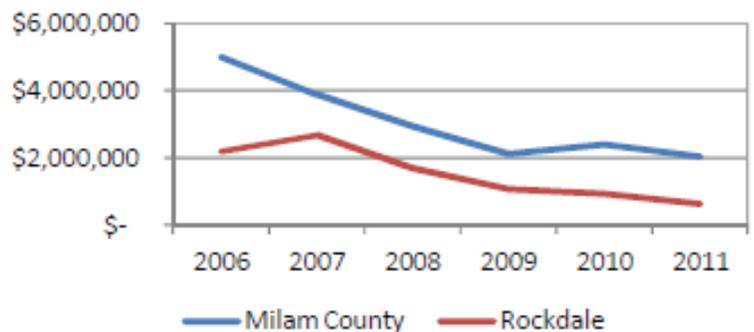
This information indicates that the local resident market is not likely to be a source of general economic growth that could support widespread downtown revitalization in Rockdale. Revitalization efforts will have to be limited in scope and structured to take advantage of market demand from both local residents and out of town visitors.

## Strategic Recommendations

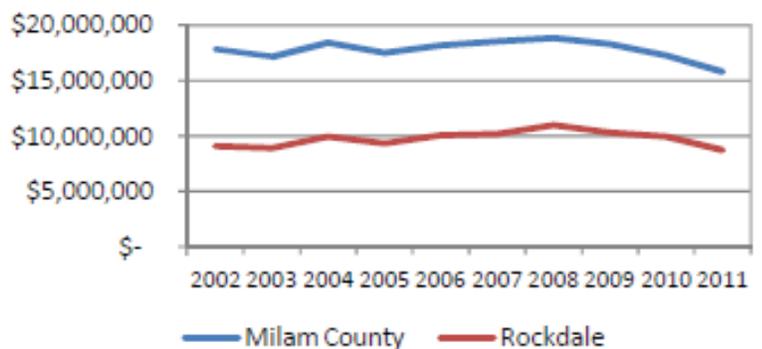
In light of the findings from the meetings, interviews, and economic / demographic research, CDS |Spillette recommends the following strategies to pursue revitalization in downtown Rockdale.

1. Because the local market lacks sufficient strength to support substantial revitalization, efforts must be made to attract business from visitors and pass-through traffic. In terms of urban design, this means working with TxDOT to modify the design and operation of US 79 to provide maximum exposure in downtown Rockdale; lights should be timed to ensure traffic is not traveling excessively fast. On street parking should be configured to be as straightforward as possible. If diagonal parking is converted to parallel, signage should be installed to indicate that more parking is available along side streets. Parallel parking would allow streetscape improvements such as decorative

**Figure 3: Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores**



**Figure 4: Eating and Drinking Places**



Source: Texas State Comptroller

elements, trees, and planters that would help catch the eye of drivers and encourage them to stop.

2. The city will need to elevate the exposure of downtown to the greater central Texas market by (1) creating regular events in downtown and (2) installing temporary uses of underutilized buildings and lots. The regular rotation of events – at least monthly – should be programmed to avoid direct competition with events in other locations. Possible programs could include car shows and rallies, events catering to weekend bicyclists from the Austin area, themed food festivals and markets (could differ month to month), and specialized crafts (quilts, furniture etc.). Some level of uniqueness is key; having a non-themed craft / antique market may not be enough to bring differentiated publicity relative to other towns.

Instead of relying upon total renovation of existing buildings to remedy underutilization, consider a program of “pop up” or temporary retailers to occupy

vacant ground floor spaces during short periods, such as weekends. The MDD and RDA could work with building owners and the City of Rockdale to ensure that these spaces are cleaned up enough, liability issues are addressed, occupancy fees are allocated, and permitting is straightforward. These pop-up uses could be coordinated with the entrepreneurship initiatives recommended in the 2011 REV-UP study. Food service could be an option for these uses if preparation is done off-site. During inactive periods between occupancies, window displays of art or other eye-catching materials will help to avoid a massive drop-off in visual appeal.

3. The façade grant program being considered by the MDD is a positive. It is good practice to require a matching contribution of some level from the property owner. The focus should be on US 79 since it has the highest volume of visitor traffic.

4. In the long term, revitalization requires that the downtown buildings be safe and habitable. As these structures age and deteriorate, this becomes more and more financially difficult given the limited financial rewards compared to the remediation cost. The City should actively enforce building codes so that truly dangerous structures are either fixed or removed. The danger, of course, is that visually appealing historical

building stock is lost.

To mitigate this situation, the MDD could create a building renovation loan fund. Using a portion of its future tax revenues as repayment cash flow, the MDD could issue a debt note to capitalize the fund. It could then offer building renovation loans to property owners. The loans should be relatively short term (Beaumont's program has a maximum amortization period of 10 years) and attempt to offer an affordable interest rate, roughly matching the rate on the MDD's own note. The MDD should require matching financing from the building owner, in terms of private sector equity and debt, of at least 1:1 so that it is not primarily the MDD at risk if the venture fails; if a private lender is participating that indicates there is some credibility to the effort.

Given the limited tax revenues and market opportunities in Rockdale, it is important to keep a realistic perspective about the potential for any of these efforts and manage expectations. Just getting temporary occupancy of three or four tenant spaces during a weekend, using a vacant lot for a regular event or market, or renovating one or two buildings would represent a significant achievement.



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### **POP-UP PROJECT – FAQ Sheet**

#### **What is the Main Street Pop-Up Shop Program?**

This program is a creative initiative harmonizing Main Street, City of Lawrenceburg, and private landlords to offer selected business operators a no cost, short term lease for a designated period of time. Selected businesses will be expected to create visual appeal to vacant buildings, both interior and storefronts. This program seeks to turn our vacant spaces into opportunities by matching capable and creative individuals and groups with landlords of buildings with available first floor spaces. It is our hope that selected businesses will be open to considering a longer term presence in downtown Lawrenceburg.

#### **What are the goals of the program?**

Our goal is twofold. (Short term and term objectives) First, we are looking to identify businesses that would be a great fit both for our downtown community and for the business. Filling some of the available space will enhance the atmosphere and experience for downtown's visitors. Keeping this in mind, it is our desire to develop downtown as a retail, arts and entertainment destination.

#### **Will Main Street provide marketing support?**

Yes, Main Street will promote the Pop Up Shops in all of the "What's Up in Downtown Lawrenceburg" newsletters, ads, social media, air and print media and on [www.thinklawrenceburg.com](http://www.thinklawrenceburg.com) website. Pop up Shop participants should also do their own marketing as well.

#### **How do I apply?**

Simply fill out the application and submit it to Lawrenceburg Main Street Association, 70 East High Street, Lawrenceburg, IN, drop off or email to [info@thinklawrenceburg.com](mailto:info@thinklawrenceburg.com). The selection committee will review all applications and phone you or email you with any questions.

#### **When is the application deadline?**

The deadline to apply is 5:00 pm, EST, August 22, 2012.

#### **By when do you expect to make a decision?**

The selection committee plans to inform the program participants on August 27, 2012.

#### **Will I be notified if I am not selected?**

Yes, we will notify all applicants.

#### **By when do I need to be open for business?**

All program participants must be ready to open for business between Thursday, September 13 and September 21, 2012 and be prepared to remain in operation for ninety days. Main Street will coordinate a grand opening celebration at an agreed upon date between September 13 and September 21, 2012.

*Sample Pop-Up Retail Requirements (Lawrenceburg, Indiana)*

**By when do I need to vacate the storefront?**

At this time, participants will be given until December 31, 2012 to vacate the space.

**What if I am interested in the program but I do not have enough merchandise to fill an entire space?**

You may indicate that you would be willing to share a space with a complimentary user when you complete the interest sheet.

**What criteria will the selection committee consider when reviewing my application?**

Businesses will be selected based on the appeal of their product mix for downtown Lawrenceburg shoppers, how well their concept works in synergy with current full time tenants, their ability to add excitement to the atmosphere through in store events, promotions, the viability of the business concept, and the quality of their proposed window displays.

**What types of shops do you want to attract?**

We would like to attract local or regional establishments that feature gifts, home goods and décor, apparel and accessories, specialty food, books, sporting goods, pets, and art/culture related retail items.

**Are there required hours of operation?**

In order to maximize sales potential, we strongly recommend that hours of operation fall between 11:00 am and 8:00 pm on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Specific hours of operation will be agreed upon prior to September 1. Program participants will be required to be open for a minimum of four days each week for the duration of this program.

**What are the legal requirements?**

Program participants will sign a short term lease or sublease, which stipulates the terms of the short term space use requirements and wherein they agree to return the space to its original or an improved condition. Participants shall comply with insurance requirements as stipulated by the building owner and or Indiana State Law. Participants will also sign a Program Agreement with Main Street Lawrenceburg, IN.

**How many storefronts are included in the program and where are they located?**

We have secured 4 storefronts, ranging in size from approximately 400 square feet to 1200 square feet. The stores are all located on Walnut Street.

**If I am selected, will I be expected to have a website for my Pop Up Shop?**

You will need to create some kind of online presence in order for potential and current customers to learn about your Shop. This does not necessarily need to be a full fledged website. A simple Face book page may be acceptable.

You may also become a Main Street investor and post your business information, links, pictures etc. on the Main Street website. You then can direct customers to the Main Street website directory. [www.thinklawrenceburg.com](http://www.thinklawrenceburg.com) This will give you additional ways to promote your business and attract new customers.

**If selected, will I need to pay rent or basic utility costs on the space?**

No, the building owner or Main Street will cover the cost of the rent and utilities. You will however need to make arrangements for your inventory, phone service, internet and credit card processing.

**Can I alter the space?**

Improvements, including paint, may be made if permitted with prior approval by the building owner. Upon move out, the space must be returned in original, clean condition. Tenant is responsible for general upkeep of the space for the duration of the contract including cleaning, light bulb replacement, etc.

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## Parking by Design

Despite aiming to increase the pedestrians in downtown, the majority of patrons of downtown are and will continue to be visitors who arrive by car, leading to increasing demands for parking. However, people do not come to downtown because there is ample parking. They come because of the strong sense of place and multiple uses located closely together: shopping, restaurants, entertainment, government services, etc. So how can the demands for parking coincide with maintaining a strong sense of place and pedestrian-friendly environment? Here are seven core principles that strive to balance these two elements.

- Understand that parking is subservient to the uses and environment that draw people downtown. While the downtown environment drives the demand for parking, simply increasing the supply of parking will damage the sense of place in downtown, eventually decreasing downtown patronage and parking demand.
- Strategically locate parking facilities where they have minimal disruption of the downtown environment. Avoid placing them directly on major commercial streets or along corridors and areas with high pedestrian traffic. Rather, parking lots and structures should be placed in the interior of a property, wrapped by buildings where they are close to destinations, but not impacting the street. Well-marked signage will indicate to drivers the location of parking.
- Recognize the value of on-street parking. Drivers prefer on-street parking because of its visibility, accessibility, and the proximity to their destination. On-street parking has the added benefit to pedestrians because it buffers them from auto traffic on the street and slows vehicles. On-street parking should be taken into account when evaluating the supply of parking in downtown.
- Emphasize quality design of parking facilities. Blank walls and vast parking lots create dead zones in the downtown fabric and disrupt the pedestrian environment. Guidelines should be adopted that establish standards for the exterior of parking structures; wrap parking structures with street-level commercial establishments; and implement landscaping requirements to soften the visual impact of surface parking lots.

Once parked, the driver becomes a pedestrian, and design elements of parking facilities should reinforce the transition from driver to pedestrian. This includes providing pedestrian pathways within parking lots and structures; increasing pedestrian safety by protecting walkways from parking spaces; slowing vehicles with landscaping, textured or colored paving, and tight curb radii; including wayfinding signage to direct pedestrians to downtown destinations; and providing pedestrian amenities such as benches and lighting.

- Make better use of existing spaces. Many times, perceived parking shortages are a result of unawareness of where parking exists. The goal should be to increase awareness of un-used parking spaces rather than simply increasing parking. This can be done through strong directional signage, publicizing the locations on websites, and providing information through businesses.

Another option is to promote shared parking. This is where multiple uses with different peak parking periods share parking spaces.

- Control total volume of downtown parking. Often, cities have minimum off-street parking requirements for new construction. However, this often leads to decreasing density and increasing the ratio of parking land to total land area in downtown. Eventually, downtown would become a sea of parking to serve the limited number of businesses. Rather, cities should require maximum parking requirements and utilize flexible parking arrangements such as shared parking for new downtown construction and businesses.
- Finally, parking should be planned comprehensively and in its downtown context. Downtown parking should understand its impact on the downtown environment and support the principles of a strong sense of place and pedestrian-friendly environment.

*Source: Robertson, Smart Downtown Parking: Core Principles to Support Downtown Development, May 2005*

## ROCKDALE DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN - RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for downtown Rockdale are discussed in this section. They include both short term and longer term actions, as well as preliminary cost estimates for each action. The specific actions are shown in the table on the following page, and each is discussed in detail after the table.

Recommended funding sources for each action, as well as overall funding strategies are also noted in this section. Funding sources are noted in a preliminary sense, and none have been approved by the entities listed.

The recommendations are divided into four major categories. These are:

**1. Appearance** – downtown Rockdale has good building stock, but sidewalk features, some derelict buildings and signs create an unsightly appearance. Actions to address this general area of concern include:

- Sidewalk improvements, divided into three phases
- Property code enforcement actions
- Improvements to Wolf Park, which also has ramifications for downtown events
- A Landscape and Banner program
- Improvements to signs throughout the downtown area
- Creation of downtown gateways

**2. Building Restoration and Occupancy** – this category of recommendations address improvements to existing buildings in the downtown area to improve their appearance and to preserve their usefulness for the foreseeable future. This category is perhaps the most important to pursue in the short term, since it has a direct correlation to making downtown more attractive for new businesses and to incentivize property owners to invest in their buildings.

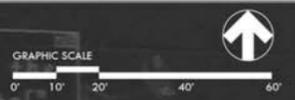
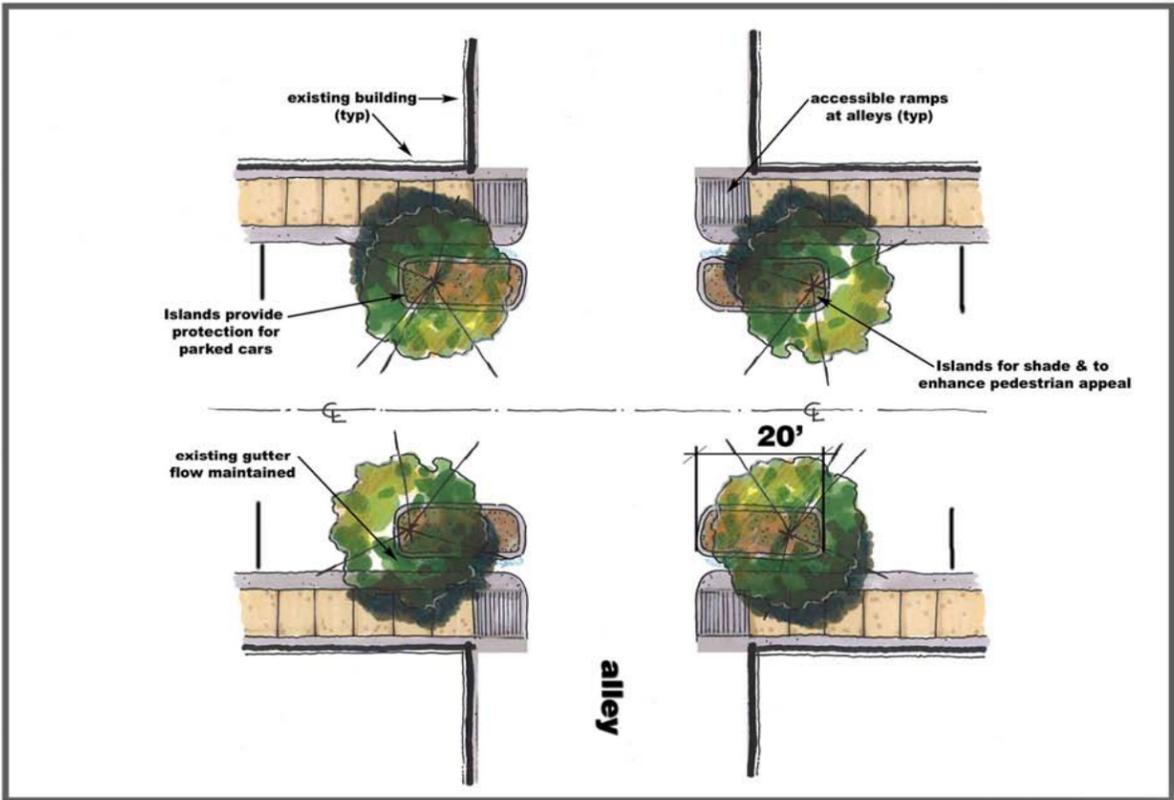
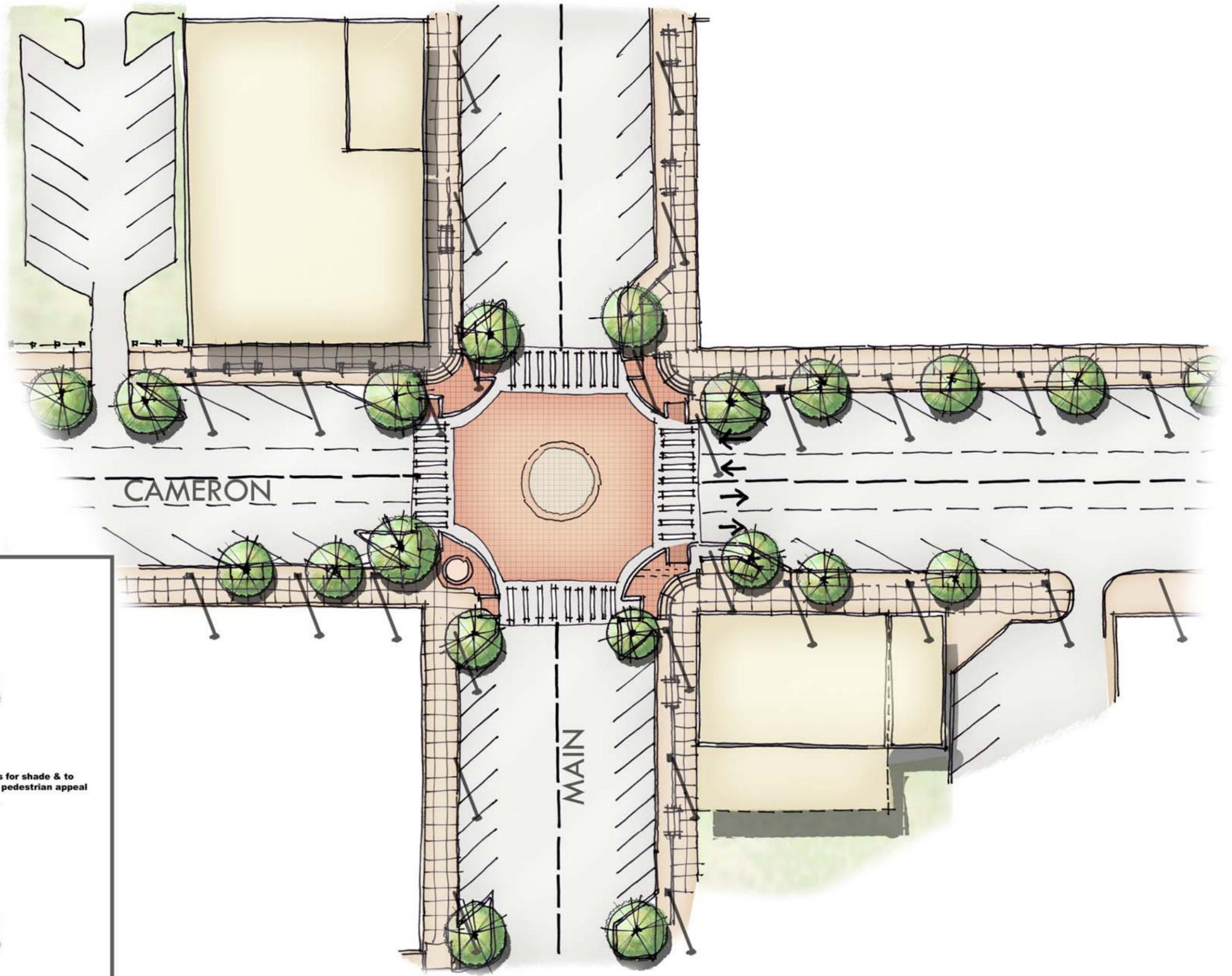
**3. “Destination Downtown”** – the third category of recommendations addresses activities and events that draw attention to the downtown area and that provide help to create a healthy business environment for downtown users.

Recommendations include:

- Creating an “antiques” concentration in the downtown area
- Creating a small business incubator to foster the development of new businesses in Rockdale
- Improving coordination and scheduling events and activities in conjunction with other major area events, such as concerts at Apache Pass
- Create a location for artists in the downtown area, similar to the small business incubator mentioned above
- Increasing the number of weekend events in the downtown area, so as to increase visitation to downtown Rockdale
- Friday night music in the park
- Begin a farmers market in the downtown area, preferably near or in Wolf Park
- Complete renovations to the Kay Theater and promote activities in it

**4. Staffing and Funding** – a fourth category of recommendations deals with the operational side of implementing the recommendations shown above, as well potential mechanisms to help fund the recommendations shown above.





# Downtown Rockdale Plan

## CONCEPTUAL SITE LAYOUT Typical Intersection and Alley Island Detail

George Sessions Perry  
1910-1956  
September 2012



Disclaimer: Plan shown is based on best available information and is subject to change. For Conceptual use ONLY.

## Destination Downtown 2020 - The Downtown Master Plan for Rockdale

### Strategic Action Plan

Number	Action	Specific Action Steps	Lead Entity/Partners	Justification/Need for this Action	Potential Capital Investment (1)	Potential Annual Cost (2)	Potential Funding Source(s)	Priority Level
<b>Appearance</b>								
1	<b>Initial Sidewalk Appearance Campaign</b>	1. Identify old sign posts, damage railings, planters without vegetation, fading benches, etc. and improve	RDA, MDD, City of Rockdale	Immediate action to improve downtown public areas appearance. May require coordination with TxDOT for some items.	\$ 2,000	\$ 500	Downtown Business self assessment, MDD, City of Rockdale, Chamber	<b>Very High - Initiate Immediately</b>
2	<b>Sidewalk Improvement Program - Phase 1 - Main Street from Milam to Kay Theater</b>	1. Pursue grant sources and partnerships to improve Phase 1 sidewalk and streetscape improvements. 2. Submit grant applications. 3. Prepare detailed design	City of Rockdale, TxDOT, MDD	Significant unattractive feature in Downtown area, also creates walking hazards	\$ 1,000,000	\$ -	Grants, TxDOT, MDD, City of Rockdale, Individual property owners	<b>Very High - Begin Funding Pursuit</b>
3	<b>Property Safety and Appearance Code Enforcement</b>	1. Review Codes and determine if additional ordinances are needed. 2. Identify key properties for code enforcement and initiate process	City of Rockdale, Rockdale Downtown Association	Quickly addresses appearance issues	\$ -	\$ -	Conducted by current staff, no additional costs.	<b>Very High - Ongoing</b>
4	<b>Improve Wolf Park</b>	1. Create master plan for park 2. Create/update citywide parks master plan 3. Apply for grant funding 4. Arrange transfer or lease of property to City 5. Arrange for management of site	City of Rockdale, Rockdale Chamber of Commerce	Creates active venue and downtown attraction. Assumes partnership between City, Chamber and RDA to provide high level of maintenance	\$ 500,000	\$ 20,000	City of Rockdale, MDD, Donation of Land, Private Fundraising, Texas Parks and Wildlife Grants	<b>High - Initiate within 6 months</b>
5	<b>Sidewalk Improvement Program - Phase 2</b>	1. Pursue grant sources and partnerships to improve Phase 1 sidewalk and streetscape improvements. 2. Submit grant applications. 3. Prepare detailed design	City of Rockdale, MDD	Continue to implement sidewalk improvements along secondary streets in Downtown area	\$ 500,000	\$ -	Grants, TxDOT, MDD, City of Rockdale, Individual property owners	<b>High - After Initial Phase is Ongoing</b>
6	<b>Sidewalk Improvement Program - Phase 3</b>	1. Pursue grant sources and partnerships to improve Phase 1 sidewalk and streetscape improvements. 2. Submit grant applications. 3. Prepare detailed design	City of Rockdale, MDD	Continue to implement sidewalk improvements towards western part of the City	\$ 250,000	\$ -	Grants, TxDOT, MDD, City of Rockdale, Individual property owners	<b>High - After Initial Phase is Ongoing</b>
7	<b>Landscape and Banner Program</b>	1. Develop responsibilities for landscape and banner maintenance 2. Consider funding through property owner assessment	RDA, MDD, City of Rockdale	Annual recurring cost, promotes downtown and	\$ 5,000	\$ 10,000	Downtown Business self assessment, Chamber, MDD, City of Rockdale	<b>High - Initiate within 6 months</b>
8	<b>Sign Improvements</b>	1. Create downtown specific sign requirements 2. Implement as business transition occurs	City of Rockdale, Rockdale Downtown Association	Creates attractive downtown appearance	\$ -	\$ -	Conducted by current staff, no additional costs.	<b>Medium - Initiate with 1 year</b>
9	<b>Create Downtown Area "Gateways"</b>	1. Develop detailed plan for gateway features 2. Pursue funding sources	City of Rockdale, MDD	Creates entrances into downtown, improves appearance of Cameron Boulevard	\$ 250,000	\$ 5,000	City of Rockdale, MDD, Donations, Private Fundraising, Grant sources (TxDOT?)	<b>Medium - Initiate with 1 year</b>
<b>Subtotal</b>					<b>\$ 2,507,000</b>	<b>\$ 35,500</b>		

## Destination Downtown 2020 - The Downtown Master Plan for Rockdale

### Strategic Action Plan

Number	Action	Specific Action Steps	Lead Entity/Partners	Justification/Need for this Action	Potential Capital Investment (1)	Potential Annual Cost (2)	Potential Funding Source(s)	Priority Level
<b>Building Restoration and Occupancy</b>								
1	<b>Implement Façade Improvement Grant Program</b>	1. Develop program guidelines 2. Identify funding level 3. Promote program aggressively 4. Ensure longer term continuity and adjust funding levels based on short term interest	MDD, City of Rockdale	Improves building appearance, creates confidence in the downtown area	\$ -	\$ 30,000.00	Rockdale MDD, City of Rockdale	<b>Very High - Implement Immediately</b>
2	<b>Building Renovation Low Interest Loan Program</b>	1. Develop program requirements 2. Arrange financing source 3. Arrange guaranteeing entity	MDD, City of Rockdale, Rockdale Chamber of Commerce	Many aging buildings, need to reverse deterioration is critical. Helps owners secure financing through guarantees	\$ -	\$ 10,000.00	Area financial institutions, MDD	<b>Very High - Implement within 6 months</b>
3	<b>Building Renovation Incentive Package</b>	Refine Property Tax Abatement Program	City of Rockdale, MDD	Property Tax Abatement,	\$ -	\$ 10,000.00	City of Rockdale, MDD	<b>Very High - Ongoing, Adjust within 6 Months</b>
4	<b>Vacant Building Incentive Program</b>	1. Develop program goals, requirements and criteria 2. Approve and Fund	MDD	Spurs bringing uses into vacant buildings, and assists businesses wanting to relocate to downtown	\$ -	\$ 10,000.00	MDD, City of Rockdale	<b>Very High - Very High, Implement within 6 Months</b>
5	<b>Building Lease Rate Analysis</b>	1. Conduct comparable lease rate analysis with similar communities 2. Work with property owners to balance affordable lease rates with incentive programs	MDD	Work to ensure that lease rates are reasonable and do not hinder downtown occupancy	\$ -	\$ -	Rockdale MDD, City of Rockdale	<b>Very High</b>
<b>Subtotal</b>					<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 60,000</b>		

## Destination Downtown 2020 - The Downtown Master Plan for Rockdale

### Strategic Action Plan

Number	Action	Specific Action Steps	Lead Entity/Partners	Justification/Need for this Action	Potential Capital Investment (1)	Potential Annual Cost (2)	Potential Funding Source(s)	Priority Level
<b>Destination Downtown</b>								
1	<b>Pursue creation of an "Antiques" Concentration in Rockdale</b>	1. Pursue several other antiques businesses to create a more sizable market for antiques in Rockdale 2. Revise approach to encourage tasteful outdoor display 3. Use existing businesses as mentors	MDD, Chamber of Commerce, RDA	Explore to determine if it can become a core business model for Rockdale	\$ 25,000	\$ -	MDD, Chamber of Commerce, RDA	<b>Very High - Initiate Immediately</b>
2	<b>Create a Business Incubator in the Downtown Area (3)</b>	1. Identify location and key needs of the incubator 2. Identify funding needs	MDD, Chamber of Commerce, RDA	Creates addition business attractor for all of Milam County, also benefits downtown area	\$ -	\$ -	MDD, Chamber of Commerce, RDA	<b>Very High - Initiate Immediately</b>
3	<b>Coordinate activities with other Major Regional Events</b>	1. Identify area events over next 2 years, develop	RDA, MDD, Chamber of Commerce	Explore potential to piggyback off of other area events	\$ -	\$ 5,000	RDA, Chamber of Commerce, MDD	<b>Very High - Initiate Immediately</b>
4	<b>Pursue an arts entity/entities in the Downtown Area</b>	Identify potential area artists, explore types of requirements, explore venue within the downtown area	MDD, Chamber of Commerce, RDA	Potential added attraction for downtown area. Potential location in sheds along Milam Street	\$ 25,000	\$ -	MDD, Chamber of Commerce, RDA	<b>High</b>
5	<b>Frequent Weekend Events - Wolf Park</b>	1. Identify major events, identify minor more frequent events 2. Organize, identify costs and funding mechanisms 3. Promote events	RDA, MDD, Chamber of Commerce		\$ 10,000	\$ 5,000	RDA, Chamber of Commerce, MDD	<b>High</b>
6	<b>Friday Night Music in the Park</b>	1. Identify musicians and schedule 2. Promote / incentivize event 3.	Rockdale Downtown Association, Chamber of Commerce, MDD, City of Rockdale	Promotes interest in Downtown Rockdale		\$ 5,000	RDA, Chamber of Commerce, MDD	<b>High</b>
7	<b>Farmers Market (must be consistently promoted and supported)</b>	1. Create venue 2. Promote Event	Rockdale Downtown Association, Chamber of Commerce, MDD, City of Rockdale	Creates known downtown attraction, Instills community pride		\$ 1,500	RDA, Chamber of Commerce, MDD	<b>High</b>
8	<b>Complete Kay Theater Renovations (both interior and exterior)</b>	1. Accelerate rate of improvement 2. Identify additional potential grant sources, 3. Continue to pursue partnerships and event programming to bring in funding	Kay Theater, MDD, City of Rockdale	Creates a significant attraction in the downtown area. Consider accelerating exterior improvements	\$ 350,000	\$ 20,000	Grants, Private Donations and Fund Raising Events, MDD	<b>High</b>
9	<b>Hire Implementer if necessary</b>	1. If needed to accelerate actions, consider hiring part-time or full-time staff to pursue detailed requirements for strategies	MDD, Chamber, City of Rockdale	Assists in background efforts to organize and promote events and other activities instead of reliance on volunteers	0	\$ 25,000	MDD, City of Rockdale	<b>Medium - Initiate with 1 year</b>
<b>Subtotal</b>					<b>\$ 410,000</b>	<b>\$ 61,500</b>		

# 1. APPEARANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

A sense that a downtown is thriving and is a great place to visit begins with its appearance. While downtown Rockdale has a surprisingly large collection of preserved downtown buildings, and while newer infill buildings have to some degree maintained the setbacks and scale of a traditional downtown, the appearance of the street environment and sidewalks around these buildings has suffered.

In particular, multiple sidewalk and accessibility ramp improvements over a long period of time have resulted in an mix of looks as well as areas in significant disrepair. Remnant street fixtures, poles, and leftover landscape features from previous improvement cycles remain in place and contribute to an unattractive appearance.



Cameron, Main and Akerman are streets that are owned and managed by the Texas Department of Transportation, and as such will require coordination and approval by TxDOT for any improvements.

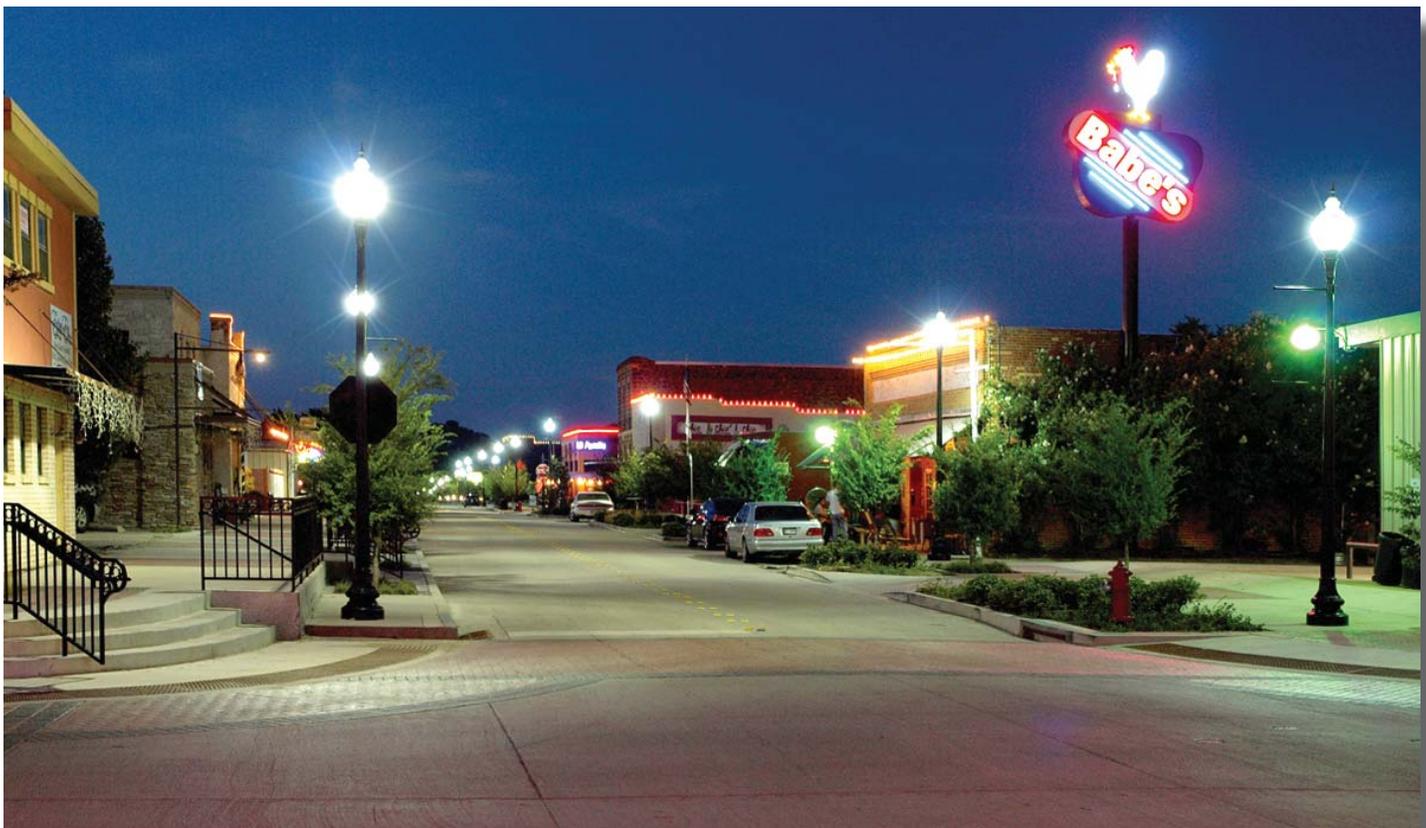
Appearance recommendations are as follows:

## Actions 1 - Immediate Smaller Improvements

Within 6 months, organize cleanup, painting of existing street planters, benches, remove old remnant light and sign poles, paint older railings at corners.

## Actions 2, 4 and 5 - Sidewalk improvements

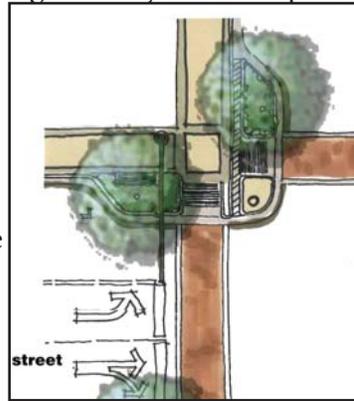
Differences in elevation between the street and adjacent buildings in much of the downtown area result in the need for steps and ramps to provide adequate accessibility. Prior improvements related to accessibility installed ramps and railings throughout the downtown area that have since been hit by parked cars, are unpainted, and are fundamentally unattractive. From an appearance and walkability standpoint, improving sidewalks in the downtown is the single most important priority, but also the most expensive. Americans with Disability requirements



*Proposed sidewalk treatments will create corner intersections similar to those in Roanoke, Texas*

and the applicable Texas version of those requirements are stringent and have to be met if sidewalk improvements are installed.

At intersections, the plan recommends that new sidewalk extensions into the right of way be developed, as shown in the sketch below on this page.



These provide more space for ramp landings as well as stairs and also decrease the pedestrian crossing distance across blocks, making downtown much more walkable. Brick color insets at these corners can also help to foster the look of an older but well preserved downtown. The photograph on the preceding page from Roanoke, Texas illustrates how sidewalk ramps and bumpout areas can improve the appearance of a downtown.

Planters can be considered, but if installed must have a bullet proof maintenance plan to water and maintain all vegetation. Current planters in the downtown area are attractive and if replicated could be a unique feature of the downtown area. However there are by far too few planters in place, and many are not maintained or have no plants in them. That signals that no one

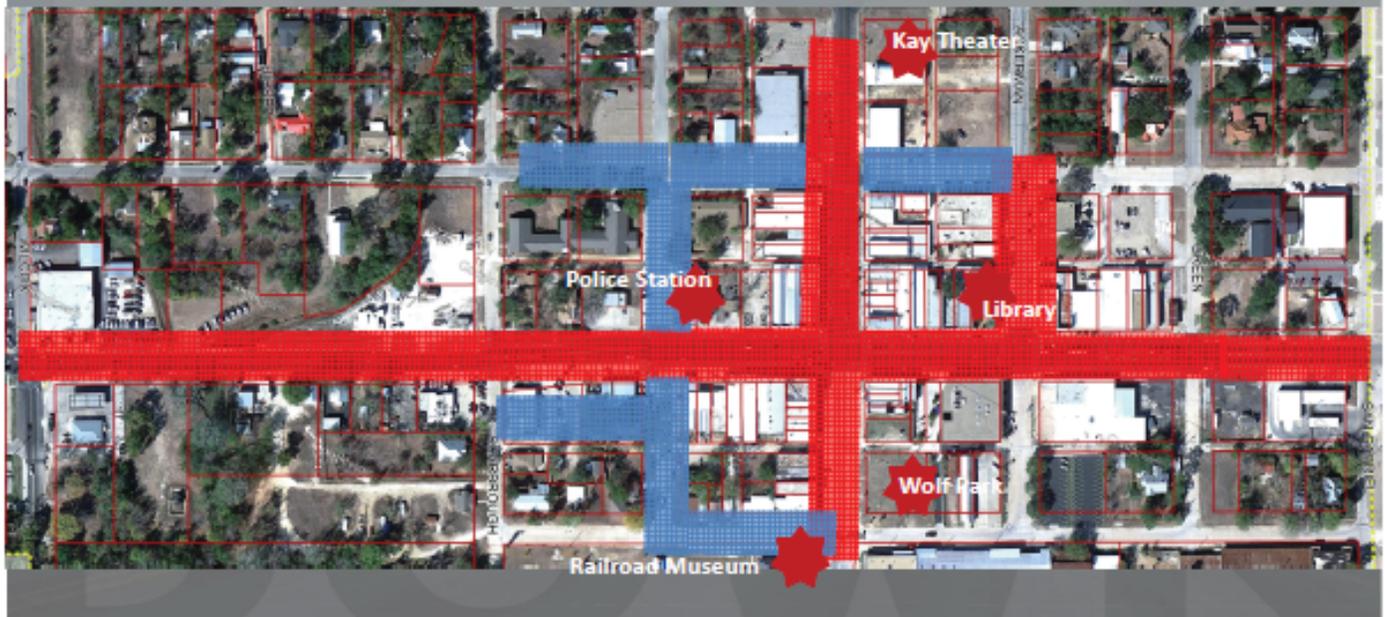
cares, contributing to the overall feeling of neglect in the downtown area.

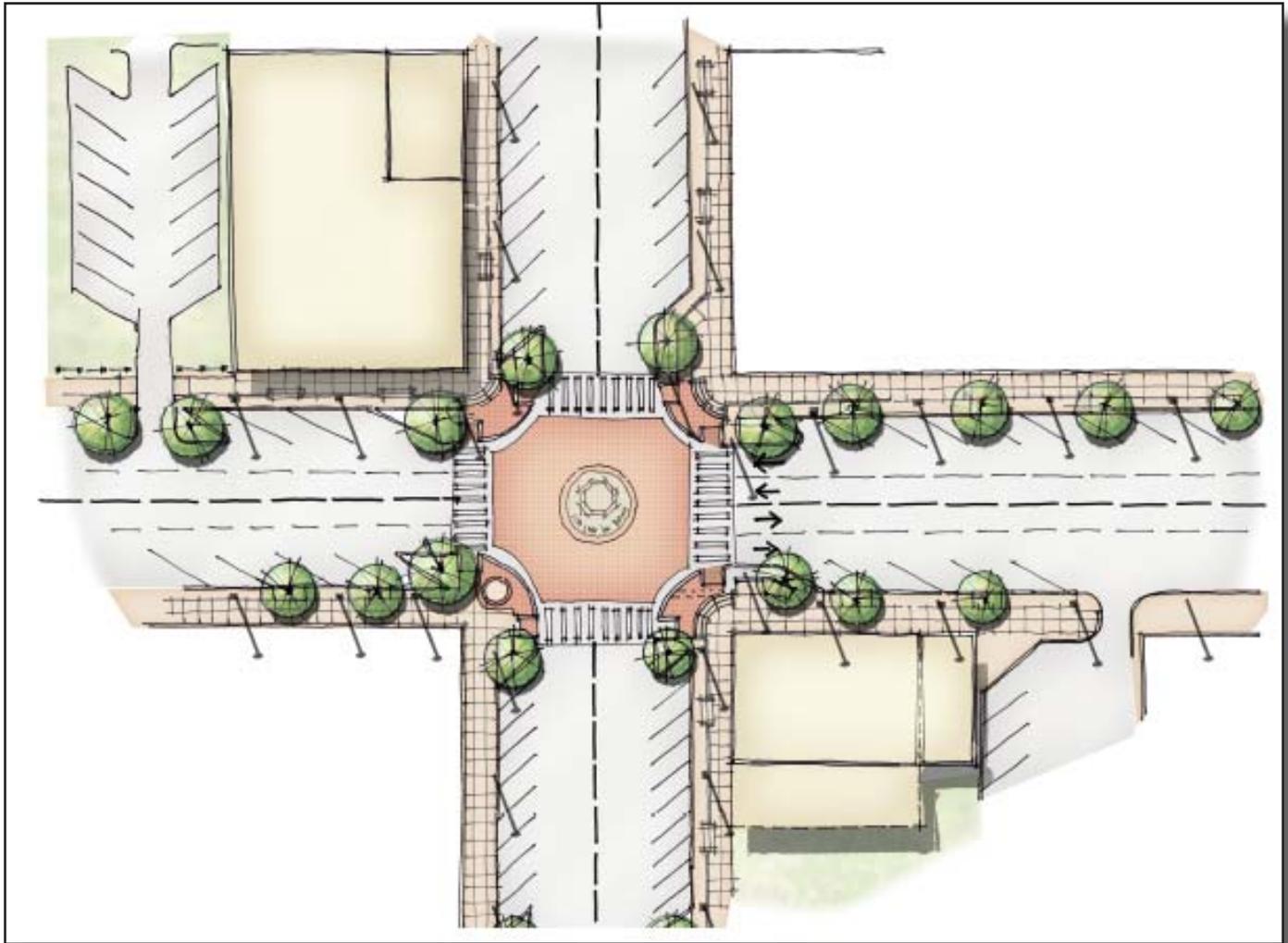


This plan recommends that sidewalks be improved in the downtown area in two ways. The first is through a major city initiated project effort which would improve multiple blocks at a time. The second is by individual property owners as they improve areas adjacent to their buildings, following the overall master plan theme recommended by this plan.

**Recommendations** – Consider installing sidewalk improvements in three phases (as shown on the following page):

## Appearance - Sidewalks





*Plan illustrating corner detail at Cameron Avenue and Main Street - Decorative pavers are optional if funding allows.*

**1. Cameron Boulevard from Green to Burleson, and Main Street from Milam north to Davila** – these sections are the most visible components of the downtown area, and at least 80% of the sidewalks and corner ramps in this area need to be improved. Both are TxDOT governed streets and will require active TxDOT review and approval. Truck traffic on both streets also mandates that corner radii accommodate large vehicle turning radii. As an option, consider brick paver crosswalks on both sides of Cameron crossing Main to serve as “gateway” elements into the heart of the downtown area.

This area is well suited for an enhancement grant application, using Federal funding. The connection between the Railroad Museum and the Kay Theater should be emphasized, as well linking in Wolf Park and events that happen there. Accessibility improvements should also be emphasized as a component of these improvements. Federal funding may be impacted by the way federal dollars are allocated, and will require

discussions with TxDOT to determine if and when funding is available.

**2. Sidewalk connection improvements from Downtown to South Wilcox and Rockdale City Hall** – the quarter mile between Burleson and Wilcox has no sidewalks, and the narrow two or three lane configuration of Cameron makes it an unattractive place to walk. The sidewalk connection is easier on the north side of Cameron, and should consist of a simple 5’ wide sidewalk. New street trees should also be included as sidewalks are put in place. Some of those trees, especially in the area of the monument retailer, may need to be placed on the monument property if the available right of way is not wide enough.

The crossing over the drainage culvert east of Wilcox will require that the roadway be narrowed to allow for a minimum 5’ wide sidewalk, or that a separate pedestrian bridge (at a higher cost) be constructed. Sidewalks on the south side of Cameron will be more

expensive and require some retaining walls. These may be considered as a future phase.

**3. Additional sidewalk improvements along Ackerman, Bell, Green and Burluson** – sidewalks along secondary streets, although just as important as those along Cameron and Main, are divided into a different phase so that they can be implemented at a later stage. The technique mirrors those along Main, in that corner elevation differences are solved with new sidewalk islands, brick paver accents and steps and ramps at each corner.

## Steps for Sidewalk Improvements

**Consider immediately pursuing TxDOT enhancement grant funding in 2012** – one final round of grants will become available in September 2012. This plan recommends that the City, MDD and other entities pursue this grant. A match of at least 20% of the overall project cost, including a 12 to 15% TxDOT administrative fee will be required. With a grant request of over \$1,000,000, the match might be as much as \$200,000 to \$250,000. However the 4 to 1 leveraging of local dollars is still one of the best opportunities anywhere.

Without the grant funding from TxDOT, consider a five year program of improving one block at a time. Without grant funding, limit the scope of the project to simple sidewalk repairs and ramp improvements, and use planter landscape treatments instead of permanent tree plantings.

## Action 3 - Property Safety and Code Enforcement

Many properties in the downtown area are neglected by their owners. For some of these, a combination of City enforcement and persuasion by Downtown leaders should be used to promote short term improvements. Just cajoling property owners, some of who are absentee, may not yield much in the way of results. A combination of a carrot and stick, with the carrot being labor organized by the RDA or other organization, with owners providing materials such as paint or tools, may help to get some immediate cleanup underway. State programs for teens or unemployed workers, coordinated through the local workforce program, may also be used.



### Steps to address this action

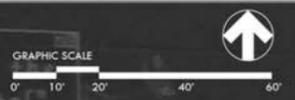
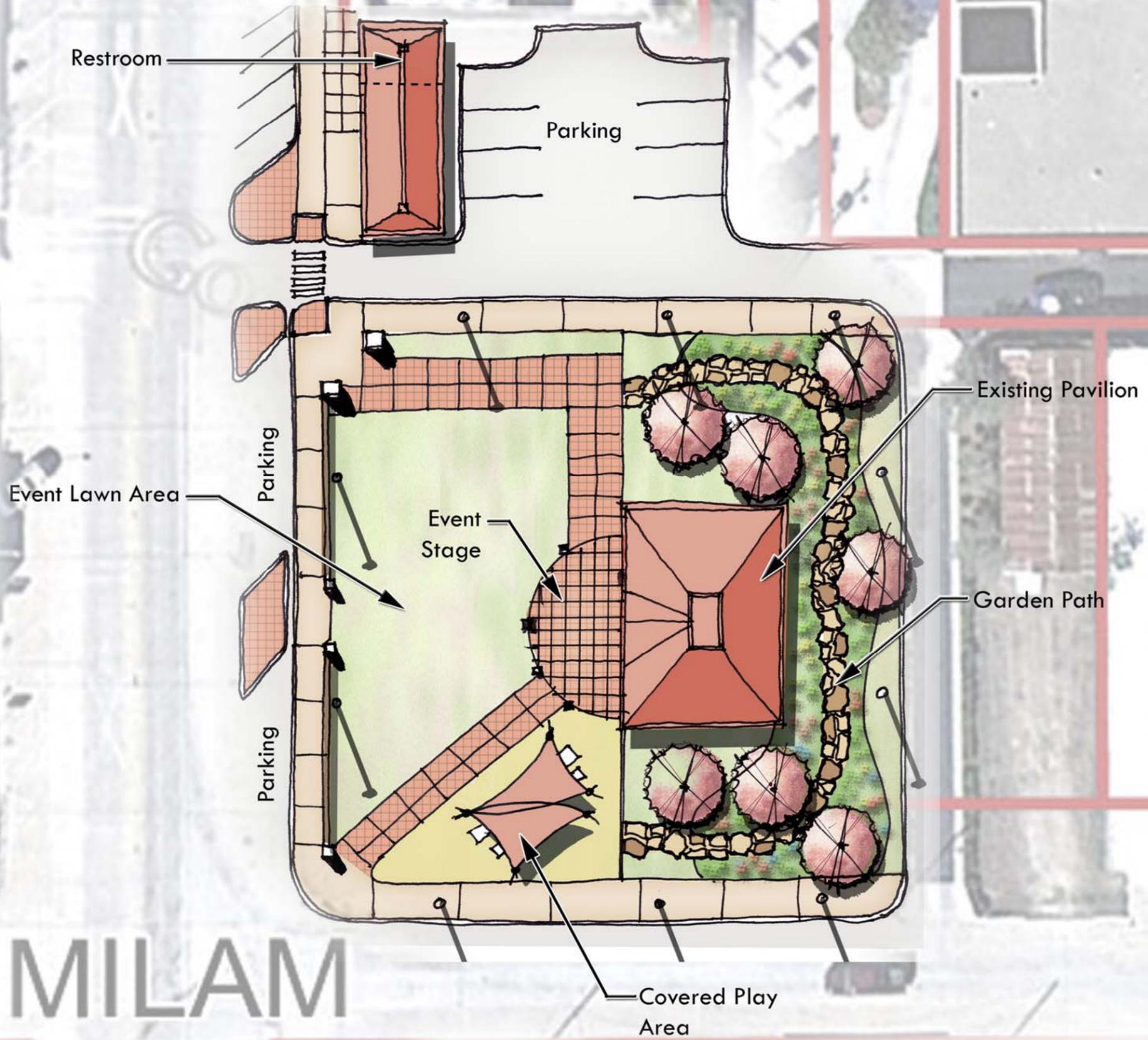
1. Begin rapid program to review downtown properties for code enforcement violations, and notify owners. Work with them to address solutions that resolve these issues.
2. Develop minimum criteria to allow participation, so as to ensure that owners that can afford to make improvements are not simply taking advantage of the availability of free labor. But recognize that some degree of improvements are preferred to continued stalling by unwilling property owners.
3. Identify three to four most critical properties for short term fixes, and meet with owners to coordinate Saturday fix-up days. Target two to three workdays for each property.
4. Identify small supplemental funding sources to cover potential liability costs, some materials, tools or other requirements to expedite improvements.
5. Install a recognition program to publicly thank and recognize youth and other workforce volunteers who participate in this program.

## Action 6 - Improve Wolf Park

Wolf Park is owned by the Rockdale Chamber of Commerce, and is in the heart of Downtown Rockdale. The privately owned park is approximately 2 acres in size. It has a large pavilion, several benches and a message board kiosk. Parking around the site is plentiful, and includes spaces along Milam, Main and Ackerman. The site itself has no on-site parking. The actual market land value of the park is estimated to be between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

The park is occasionally used for events, and infrequently used by Rockdale residents. Master plan team members, in over 10 visits to Rockdale, saw the park in use only once (during the March Auto Show).

The park should be improved so that it attracts daily



# Downtown Rockdale Plan

CONCEPTUAL SITE LAYOUT  
**Wolf Park**

George Sessions Perry  
 1910-1956  
 September 2012



Disclaimer: Plan shown is based on best available information and is subject to change. For Conceptual use ONLY.

use and becomes the venue for frequent events that bring Rockdale residents and visitors to the Downtown area. The proposed concept plan for Wolf Park is shown on the following page.

To become a key downtown attraction, Wolf Park must have features that attract families, youth and older residents of the City, as well as continue to serve as a site for major events.

This site is one of the best opportunities for grant funding in the City. Ownership would need to be transferred or leased to the City to serve as a portion of the local match.

### Recommendations for Wolf Park

**1. Work with the Chamber of Commerce to discuss the transfer of ownership of the site to the City of Rockdale** if the City successfully lands a Texas Parks and Wildlife outdoor recreation grant. The value of the land (estimated to be \$100,000) and the improvements on the site (the existing pavilion at \$50,000) could potentially serve as a portion of the local match for a grant submittal. In the past, grants of up to \$500,000 were available, but require a 1:1 matching grant. So, for \$500,000 in grant aid, a similar \$500,000 in local funds, volunteer labor or property would need to be raised.

**2. Include the following elements in the updated park:**

- a. A playground feature to attract young children and families to the park
- b. Additional shaded sitting areas and benches to attract visitors to the park
- c. Garden areas behind the existing pavilion to serve as a peaceful attraction in the downtown
- d. An improved “stage” area that clearly becomes the focal point for events
- e. Vertical gateway features that announce the park as a signature downtown feature

**3. Event programming in the Park:** Ramp up the number of events that are held in the park. Deliberately hold them in or near the park to build recognition of the park as the centerpiece of Downtown Rockdale. Attendance may start at a low point, but continue to promote these events to build a steady audience. Provide coupons or giveaways at events that encourage event goers to visit downtown businesses. Events can include:



- a. Concerts in the park every Thursday or Friday evening
- b. Monthly or bi-monthly Farmers Markets
- c. At least two additional major downtown events
- d. Movies in the Park (two - three every summer)
- e. Street Fairs or citywide garage sales events
- f. Joint events with the Kay Theater and the Railroad Depot



*Transformation of a vacant city-owned parcel next to Wolf Park into a new visitor parking lot, mural site and potential visitor restrooms*

Add restrooms and additional public parking on the north side of Wolf Park on City of Rockdale owned property. The illustrations on the preceding page show what the proposed parking area might look like.

## Action 7 - Landscape, Mural and Banner Program

Previous banner and small scale landscape treatments were effective but have been dormant in recent years. While low in cost, these can have an immediate effect on the appearance of the downtown area. The planter program should be initiated again, with a minimum of 8 planters installed on each side of each block. Existing planters should be painted, and a bright color may help bring a festive appearance to the downtown area. Plants with some vertical height, such as larger bushes or small trees should be considered.

Murals should be installed in several additional locations throughout the downtown. Consider “paint by numbers” mural treatments such as done in Lampasas, where citizen groups helped paint murals under the guidance of the artist. Murals should

continue to tell stories about Rockdale and about the history of the downtown. Mural examples and walls where new murals could be considered are shown below.

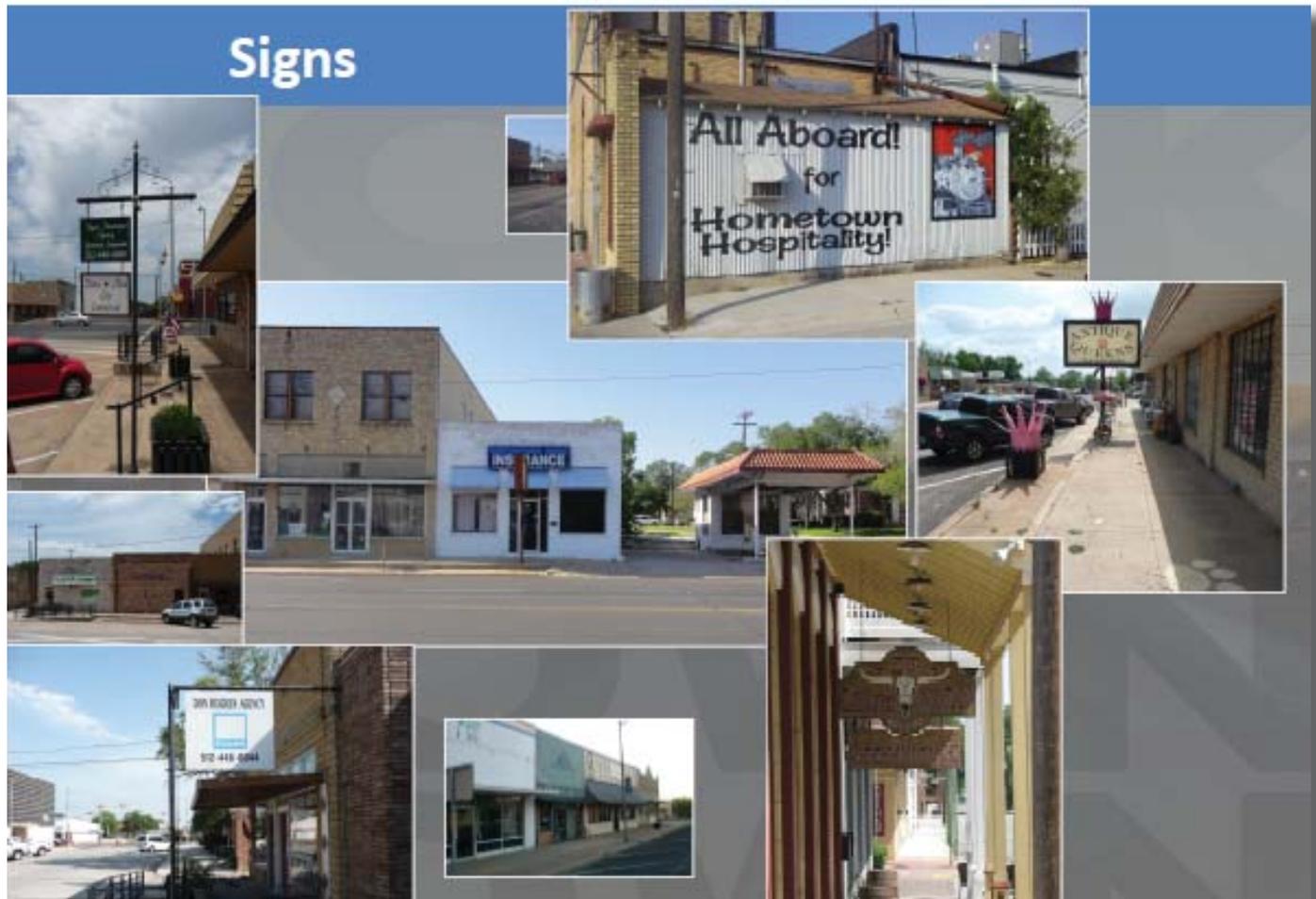
Maintenance of all landscape areas must be guaranteed, and maintenance by individual property owners is not a preferred course of action. Instead, a contract with a reputable landscape maintenance firm or individual should be funded by the RDA. City forces could also help with watering. Tapping into private water faucets in each block may be required.

### Steps to resolve landscaping maintenance

1. Determine funding mechanism – a charge to each downtown property owner should be considered. That charge would cover some of the cost of the planter, the new landscape and a short maintenance period. Consider a \$100 to \$200 charge per planter, but that cost should be adjusted to encourage participation. Alternatively, RDA fundraising events can be used to help fund this action.
2. Determine whether it is more cost effective to build new planters or to purchase planters.



Mural examples from Rockdale, Giddings & Brenham. Existing walls in Rockdale could be considered with owner approval



*Signs can be a relatively simple way to improve the appearance of downtown Rockdale but should maintain the visibility that businesses require*

3. Select uniform vegetation type.
4. Select maintenance entity and define initial time period.

## Action 8 – Sign Improvements

Signs in the downtown area are better than in many communities. However, improvements to some highly visible sign features is encouraged since these can have an immediate impact on the appearance of Downtown Rockdale. Sign improvements can be combined with façade improvements discussed in the building improvements section.

Typical sign requirements are as follows

- Generally, external illumination is preferred.
- Generic plastic signs should be eliminated.
- Wooden or metallic sign styles are preferred.
- Sign sizes should remain proportional to the size of the building.
- No hand or crudely lettered signs are allowed. All signs should be professionally created.

- Signs that are mounted perpendicular to the building and which project out over the sidewalk area are encouraged.

### Steps to accomplish this action

1. Confirm signs that may need to be updated throughout the entire downtown area. This plan includes preliminary recommendations, but these should be verified by the RDA Board and the City of Rockdale.
2. Work with each property owner or business owner to identify sign changes that are reasonable, and a time frame to accommodate those changes.
3. If needed, work with the business owner to evaluate whether a façade grant should be considered to help initiate the sign changes.

## Action 9 - Create Downtown Gateways

The City and the MDD have recently collaborated to create new gateway monuments for the downtown area. While these help promote the overall appearance of the City, additional cleanup, sidewalk installation and landscaping can begin to help build a sense of arrival into the downtown area. The recommended locations for the two gateways areas are as follows. Note that the specific wall design and colors can be tailored to City and funder preferences.

**West Gateway** – Intersection of Wilcox and Cameron, adjacent to Rockdale City Hall – This area has two key uses that are important to Rockdale, the City Hall complex and Miller Starnes Chevrolet Dealership. It is also a key intersection that provides access to Fair Park and to established residential neighborhoods.

The area currently has no sidewalks, very little landscaping with the exception of turf along the street in front of City Hall, and very little acknowledgement that you are approaching the downtown area. The mass of cars parked at the dealership is unattractive without a foreground landscaped area. Overhead power lines are unsightly and limit the height of trees that can be planted here.

**Recommendations** – the plan recommends the installation of low brick walls on two to four of the corners of this intersection. The concept plan included with this section also illustrates new sidewalk paving in front of the low brick walls. These walls may be continued in front of the dealership to provide a foreground setting for vehicle display. The height of

the walls in front of the car display areas should not exceed 24” and should not be continuous. Ornamental trees are specified because of the presence of overhead utility lines. The walls can announce “Downtown Rockdale.” The cost of this gateway area is estimated to be between \$80,000 and \$150,000.

**East Gateway** – Intersection of San Gabriel and Cameron Blvd – on the eastern edge of downtown, a similar gateway treatment using the same low walls is recommended. This gateway is estimated to cost approximately \$40,000 to \$60,000.

## 2. BUILDING RESTORATION AND OCCUPANCY RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned previously, restoring buildings in the downtown area so that they are usable and can create taxable value is perhaps the single most important recommendation of this plan. This step must go hand in hand with appearance improvements to begin the process of successful revitalization of the the downtown area.

Over the course of this planning effort, repeated mentions of roof leaks, deteriorating interiors, upper level areas that have not been improved and other major building issues were noted. In the case of some owners, adequate resources were not available to be able to invest in improving the buildings. In the case of other owners, a lack of interest in their buildings and a limited market for new tenants results in no real urgency to repair the buildings.



*Potential gateway location near Miller Starnes Chevrolet near Wilcox and Cameron Avenue*

This section recommends 5 actions to spur the renovation of existing buildings, to spark interest in developing new buildings downtown, and to increase the occupancy of vacant downtown buildings. These actions include:

1. Implement a façade grant program
2. Create a low interest building renovation loan program
3. Create property tax incentives for building renovations
4. Develop a Vacant building incentive program
5. Assemble information on building lease rates in comparable downtowns to help establish appropriate lease rates

Each of these is discussed on the following pages.

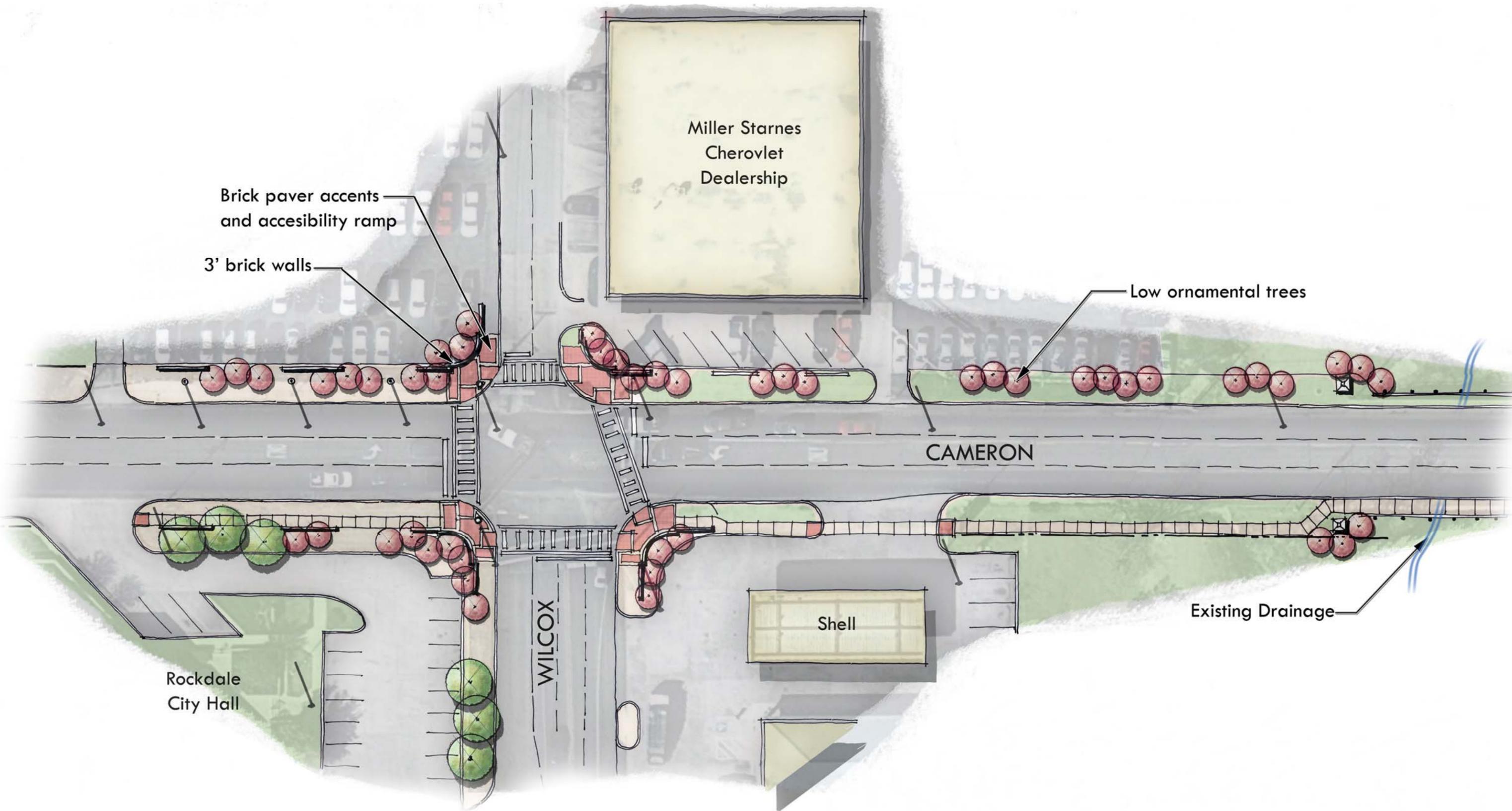
## **Action 1 – Implement A Façade Grant Program**

Vertical building facades are the most visible components of any downtown, making improvements to façades perhaps the single most important downtown action. Some buildings require very little in the way of improvements, and a new coat of paint may be sufficient. In other cases, signs, the removal of secondary coatings, new windows and doors, and even the sidewalk areas in front of the building need to be addressed.

Façade improvement programs are one of the most tried and true downtown improvement programs, and probably over 50 façade programs exist in Texas today.

Steps for this action area as follows:

1. Determine what types of improvements are eligible, and what each property owner will be required to address. Determine key considerations such as colors allowed and whether sidewalk improvements can be included. Consider whether miscellaneous items, such as improving electrical connections, weather proofing, some related roof improvements and other similar items should be included.
2. Determine the application process, the maximum grant request amount, and the level of match that a successful applicant is required to provide. A minimum of 20% match is recommended so that the property owner has a stake in the improvements.
3. Determine who will provide the funding, and how much annual funding will be set aside for this effort. It is recommended that both the City and the MDD participate in funding this program. We recommend an aggressive initial funding level that can be tapered back after the initial three to five year period.
4. Determine the time frame under which the improvements have to be made. A maximum of one year, with a possible 6 month extension is recommended.
5. Aggressively promote the program to area property owners, so that some level of competition



Brick paver accents  
and accesibility ramp

3' brick walls

Miller Starnes  
Cherovlet  
Dealership

Low ornamental trees

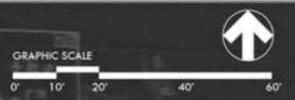
CAMERON

Existing Drainage

Rockdale  
City Hall

WILCOX

Shell



# Downtown Rockdale Plan

CONCEPTUAL SITE LAYOUT  
**West Gateway  
 Streetscape and Intersection  
 Improvements**

George Sessions Perry  
 1910-1956  
 September 2012



Disclaimer: Plan shown is based on best available information and is subject to change. For Conceptual use ONLY.



*Examples of classic and interesting facades in downtown Rockdale and one example from Giddings. Rockdale has an excellent supply of interesting downtown buildings that should be preserved*



*Buildings in the downtown area that might be candidates for facade improvements or aesthetic treatments*



*Illustration of the impact of a new awning on an existing downtown Rockdale building*

# Awnings



*Examples of awning treatments in both Rockdale and Brenham*

among properties for the available funding exists.

## Action 2 – Create a Low Interest Renovation Loan Guarantee Program

The recent damage to a downtown building, and the resulting collateral damage to adjacent buildings points to the critical need to improve roofing, mechanical, electrical and even perhaps structural systems of key downtown buildings.

As reinforced in the statements above, significant long term renovation of the downtown building stock is critical. Once removed, a downtown building is rarely reconstructed in a downtown location, given the more difficult tight construction restraints. It is imperative that a majority of the existing downtown buildings remain but are modernized for continued use for a long period of time.

The façade grant program mentioned in the step above addresses the front of the building. This

action addresses more serious exterior and interior renovations. These are the responsibility of the property owner, but in fiscally constrained times many owners simply do not have the capital to invest in their properties and do not see any possibility of tenants that might help subsidize those improvements.

There are at least 7 to 10 buildings in the downtown area that could benefit from this program immediately, and perhaps another 5 to 10 that have less serious but important improvement needs.

The low or no interest program helps to bridge that gap. Similar programs in Seguin and Beaumont have been successful in encouraging development in the downtown area.

### Steps to initiate this action

1. Determine who will manage this funding (MDD, local area bankers, etc.)
2. Work with area institutions to establish seed

funding for this action.

3. Determine the maximum loan amount (for example, \$35,000 in Seguin), interest rate conditions, and what types of improvements are eligible. Investigate whether a larger loan amount is more beneficial. Determine loan repayment period (typically no longer than 10 years).
4. Determine if grant sources are available to help fund this program, and determine whether funding from the MDD or the City of Rockdale may be required as a partial guarantee for loans made by private institutions.
5. Establish application procedures and how often the funding will be made available (typically available as long as seed capital is available).
6. Aggressively promote the program, and attempt to enlist as many properties as possible.
7. Work with the City of Rockdale, Milam County and other entities to pursue companion tax abatements that help mitigate property tax impacts once the improvements are completed.

### **Action 3 – Downtown Building Incentives**

As reinforced in the statements above, many of the downtown buildings are in urgent need of renovations. Tax abatement incentives should be reviewed, enhanced and aggressively promoted to encourage building owners to invest in their buildings. Those that do should be publicly applauded and rewarded with incentives in recognition of the importance of their efforts.

### **Action 4 – Vacant Building Program**

Follow the model of Giddings and create incentives for building owners to bring occupants to their buildings. The Giddings model allocates varying cash amounts based on the length of time a new business remains in the downtown area.

### **Action 5 – Building Lease Rate Comparison Analysis**

Enlist a local realtor to compare downtown lease rates both in Rockdale and in nearby communities such as Taylor and Giddings. Also compare non-downtown lease rates in the same communities. Use this information to work with local building owners to price their lease rates at rates that match market demand.

### **Consider hiring a Part-time Downtown Coordinator**

A major issue in Rockdale is that almost all events and activities are organized and promoted by volunteers. With limited time and expertise, the same volunteers time and time again and are reluctant to take on new efforts. The core group of involved citizens does not have the time nor the expertise to focus specifically on events, grant opportunities and promotions that can benefit all of Rockdale.

A 20 hour per week staff member would be able to help coordinate and promote events that benefit the City, the Downtown area and businesses in general throughout the City. At an average of around \$12 per hour, the annual cost for a part time person, including taxes and some fringe benefits, would be between \$15,000 and \$18,000 per year.

The cost of a Downtown staff member could be shared with the Municipal Development District (MDD) and the City of Rockdale. Given the relatively small number of members in the Downtown Association, it may be preferable to have the MDD and City hire a person and include the organization of events and some downtown specific activities in their job responsibilities.

A retired or area former downtown coordinator should be considered for this role. Note also that volunteer

efforts by Rockdale citizens will still be required to help with major events.

### **3. DESTINATION “DOWNTOWN”**

A third set of actions deals with creating interest in the downtown area. This can include festivals, everyday events, promotions and other initiatives to encourage residents of Rockdale and visitors to the City to visit the downtown area. These actions include:

1. Pursue creation of an “antiques” concentration in Rockdale
2. Create a business incubator in the downtown area
3. Coordinate activities of the RDA and downtown with other major area events
4. Pursue an arts incubator and artists to occupy buildings in the downtown area
5. Conduct frequent events at Wolf Park
6. Begin Friday Night music in the park
7. Begin a Farmers Market in or near Wolff Park
8. Complete the renovations of the Kay Theater, and initiate events there
9. Hire an implementor to help organize and coordinate these events

Each action is described in greater detail as follows.

#### **Action 1 – Pursue Creation of an Antiques Concentration in Rockdale**

Antique Queens has adopted a business model that appears to work in Rockdale. Encourage other antiques dealers to locate in Rockdale or to remain in the City by adopting a similar model. Allow and encourage downtown antiques dealers to maintain different businesses that help balance out seasonal impacts in the antiques business.

Encourage antique businesses to jointly promote their operations so as to make Rockdale a known stop on the antiques circuit.

#### **Action 2 – Create a Downtown Small Business Incubator**

Consider acquiring a downtown building to renovate and convert into a location for new small businesses in the Rockdale area. Pursue state and federal funding to assist with the incubator operations.

Consider buildings that are currently vacant or under-utilized. Evaluate whether the Municipal Development District may be able to assist with funding the acquisition of a suitable downtown building.

#### **Action 3 – Coordinate Downtown Businesses with Regional Events**

Business owners noted that they generally did not seem to coordinate or expect much benefit from large regional events such as area concerts or even the Downtown Car Show. These events should be purposefully set up to help benefit local downtown merchants. Similarly, the business owners should take advantage of any additional visitation and adjust what they are selling for those events.

#### **Action 4 – Pursue Artists/Craftsmen to Locate in Downtown Rockdale**

For harder to lease buildings that do not front on Cameron Avenue, consider encouraging local or regional artists to locate in the downtown area. However, high lease rates may be a disincentive unless owners are encouraged to lower rates.

Artists and craftsmen (such as furniture makers, glassblowers, etc.) create unique downtown draws and may generate additional interest in the downtown area.

#### **Action 5 – Frequent Events in Wolf Park**

Wolf Park is rarely used, yet it can be a significant downtown asset. Organize multiple events in the park, from every weekend outdoor sales, concerts, to simple recreation programs that encourage parents to bring their children downtown.

## Action 6 – Friday Afternoon Music at Wolf Park

Organize music events (using local or regional artists) at a regular time every couple of weeks at Wolf Park. Bring in food vendors (local preferred). Schedule the event to coordinate with area businesses, so that the additional exposure creates downtown benefits.

## Action 7 – Downtown Farmers Market

Organize a farmers market in the downtown area. Wolf Park may be a central local that fits in with drawing attention to the downtown area.

Use portable tents and the existing pavilion in Wolf Park. Assist with promoting the event, and allow it time to generate interest.

## Action 8 – Complete the Renovation of the Kay Theater

The theater can become an additional downtown draw, and in particular may interest out of town visitors. The City, Chamber, RDA and the MDD should continue to support Kay Theater organizers as they apply for grants and seek additional private support to complete the renovations.

## Action 9 – Hire a Downtown “Implementor”

As discussed in the previous section, hire a staff member to help coordinate activities and actions in the downtown area.

Artists and craftsmen (such as furniture makers, glassblowers, etc.) create unique downtown draws and may generate additional interest in the downtown area.



*Music as an attractor in the downtown area*



*Farmers Market as a downtown attractor - General sales*



*Farmers Market as a downtown attractor - plant and nursery sales*



## Chapter 4 IMPLEMENTATION

**"Community character is something a community has inherently, not something that can be applied like makeup. It is conveyed by not only grand buildings and public spaces but a whole range of urban elements. Only through the understanding and reinforcement of its character can a community flourish civically and economically."**

~American Planning Association

# IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter outlines a strategy to begin to implement the recommendations of the master plan.

## Implementation Principles

**Partnership driven** - Almost all of the actions in this plan should include the possibility of multiple partners coming together to make efforts happen faster and with more reliable funding. Partners include the Downtwon Association, the City of Rockdale, the Municipal Development District, and the Rockdale Chamber of Commerce. Each may have separate areas of responsibility as outlined in this section.

**Significant investment by the private sector and individual property owners is still the key** - The Association's role in improving downtown is to unify individual property owner interests and to guide all entities in one direction. However, most new improvements will actually be constructed by the private sector as renovation occurs.

**Incentive based** - Where appropriate to promote the City's goals, the City of Rockdale should use zoning or reimbursement incentives to accelerate key components of the plan. However, the City should evaluate each proposal to be sure that the assistance occurs only when significant benefits are likely.

**Continue to include significant citizen and business and property owner stakeholder participation** - All actions related to this plan will include extensive property owner participation.

**Staffing** - a person dedicated to addressing the needs of the downtown area needs to be hired.

**The importance of public investment** - Investment has inherent risk, and before such private investment occurs, it needs to be reassured of the future conditions and status of an area. All of the entities involved in revitalizing the downtown area need to take the first step in making that reassurance by investing public monies into downtown. Public investment not only creates a more appealing environment to generate private investment, but it also demonstrates to private investors the importance of the downtown area to the City.

## RECOMMENDED POLICY ACTIONS

Public investment and improvements only go so far. Creating downtown will be implemented in large part by the private community, including developers, community leaders, organizations, etc. Therefore, the City of Rockdale must take steps to ensure the right regulatory environment and incentives for private-sector development. The Rockdale Downtown Association needs to be an advocate for these regulations and incentives.

## Adjustments to Existing Development Codes

Development in downtown should be guided by design-based regulations. These regulations seek to establish a certain quality of place by focusing on the form of the buildings and formation of quality public space such as streets and sidewalks. These development regulations go beyond traditional land use zoning by establishing rules that regulate street frontage, sidewalks, and building placement to create the public area between buildings.

The City's regulations should seek to:

- Allow a mix of uses to achieve the densities necessary for successful downtowns and construction of some new denser housing (as shown on the concept master plan for the downtown area near the Kay Theater)
- Require better urban design for new infill buildings through building placement, building character/material standards that matches the look of downtown Rockdale, and streetscape standards to create a unique and strong sense of place.

Any changes required may be adopted in the form of an overlay district that applies additional regulations on top of the existing regulations of the base zoning. The guideline should create a framework that governs the following key elements as necessary:

- Land uses, both permitted and not permitted
- Building placement on a lot
- Building relationship to adjacent streets and to other buildings
- Compatibility between adjacent land uses
- Building size, height and volume
- Building setbacks, both minimum and maximum
- Building color and materials
- Facade articulation
- Streetscape elements along a street and adjacent to a building
- Location of parking and relationship of parking to the building and to the lot it serves
- Signage

## Public-Private Partnerships

Opportunities for public-private partnerships in downtown may include: 1) infrastructure, 2) financial incentive programs, and 3) land assembly program.

**Infrastructure** - As development is planned in Downtown Rockdale, infrastructure needs must be addressed. Public dollars may be used to upgrade infrastructure or sidewalks near a proposed redevelopment project. Water system renovation in particular needs to be undertaken to improve the marketability of the entire City. Generally, existing utilities are sufficient to support individual projects.

**Financial Incentive Programs** - To encourage investment and redevelopment in downtown, the City of Rockdale and the Rockdale Downtown Association should continue to consider providing assistance to private investors. These may include:

- Grant programs could assist property owners in cleaning up properties, renovating historic buildings, and/or improving the aesthetics of buildings. Potential grant opportunities are discussed below.
- Tax abatements to spur new development or redevelopment.
- Streamlining the administrative and approval process for development, which will save an investor money and encourage redevelopment of properties.

In addition to grants, a variety of financial mechanisms are available to assist in redevelopment of an area, which will be discussed in more detail later in this Chapter.

**Land Assembly Program** - Acquiring land by public entities may be considered where it can incentivize new development in the downtown area. The most likely method of acquiring properties for the purposes of implementing the Downtown Master Plan will be through fee simple acquisition.

# POTENTIAL FUNDING MECHANISMS

Implementation of the Downtown Master Plan will require actions on the part of the City in terms of funding. Investment on the part of the City will reassure private investors of the future of downtown. Texas law provides a number of ways to finance public improvements. The following discussion identified potential funding mechanisms and grant opportunities that can assist with public improvements and encourage private development.

## Public Funding Mechanisms

**Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) and Tax Increment Finance District (TIF)** - A TIF District is a zone where certain property tax revenue generated in the district is reinvested back into the district through development of infrastructure. TIFs operate on the idea that public investment helps stimulate and grow property values, justifying the reinvestment of property taxes back into the district generating the revenue.

**A TIF or TIRZ for downtown Rockdale would not generate significant revenue, since no major redevelopment is envisioned, but it should still be**

**evaluated in more detail. Even a small amount of revenue that is generated may help to finance needed improvements in the area.**

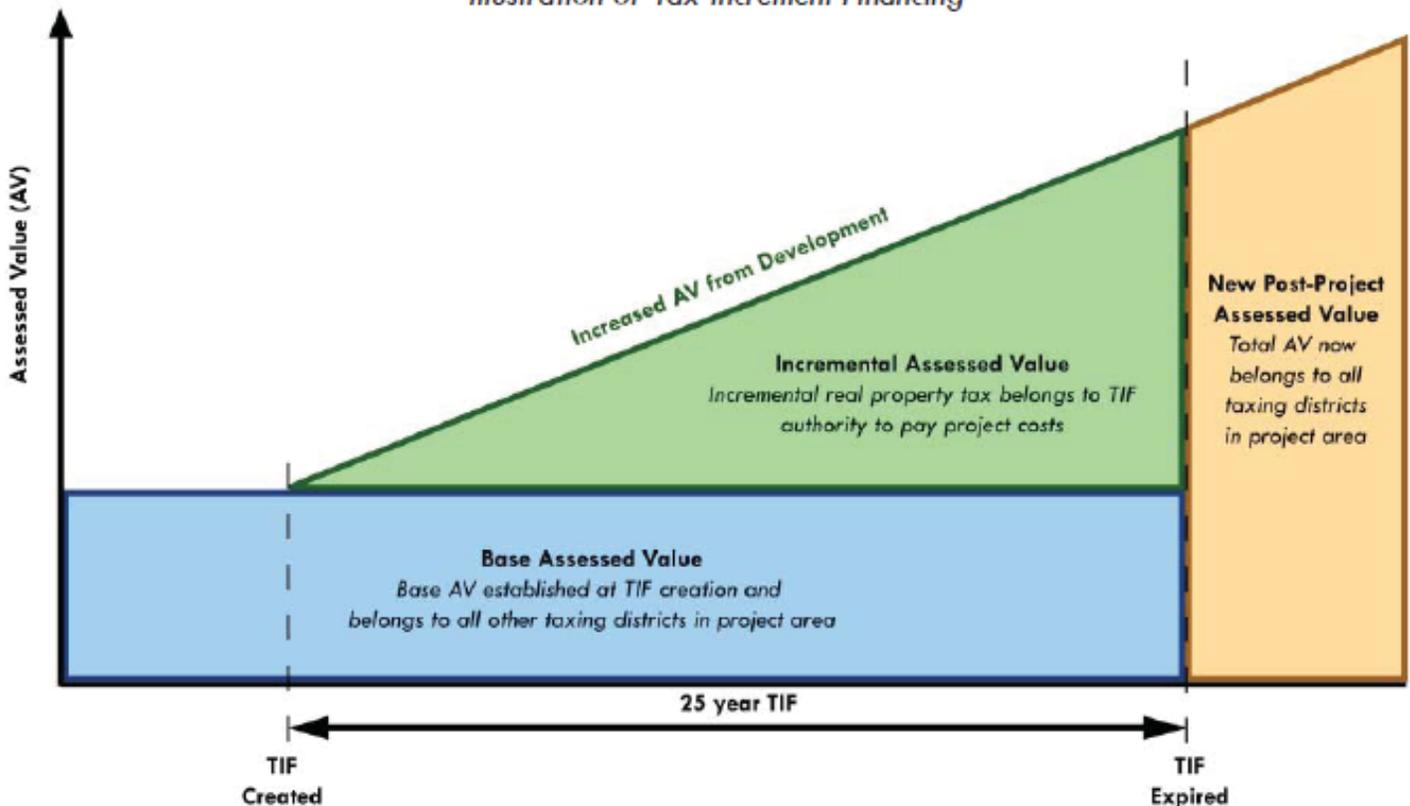
At the creation of a TIF, the assessed property value of properties of a defined area is set as the base value. Over the years, as the property values increase and property tax revenue increases, the property tax revenue generated by the incremental property value above the base is reinvested into the TIF district.

According to the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, a TIF district may be created in two ways. First, affected property owners may petition the city and city council to create a TIF district (also known as a TIRZ). The petition must be submitted by owners of property that constitutes at least 50 percent of the appraised property value within the proposed zone.

A second way of creating a TIF is by a city council without the need for a petition. If not initiated by petition, an area may be considered for a tax increment financing only if it meets at least one of the following three criteria:

- The area's present condition must substantially impair the city's growth, retard the provision

Illustration of Tax Increment Financing



of housing, or constitute an economic or social liability to the public health, safety, morals or welfare. Further, this condition must exist because of the presence of one or more of the following conditions: a substantial number of substandard or deteriorating structures, inadequate sidewalks or street layout, faulty lot layouts, unsanitary or unsafe conditions, a tax or spacial assessment delinquency that exceeds the fair market value of the land, defective or unusual conditions of title, or conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other cause.

- The area is predominantly open, and because of obsolete platting, deteriorating structures or other factors, it substantially impairs the growth of the city.
- The area is in or adjacent to a “federally-assisted new community” as defined under Tax Code Section 311.005(b).

Within developed areas of the city, such as downtown, the reason usually cited to justify a TIF district is that the area’s condition substantially impairs the city’s growth because of a significant number of substandard or deteriorating structures.

The tax code places several further restrictions on the creation of a reinvestment zone for tax increment financing:

- No more than 10 percent of the property within the reinvestment zone (excluding publicly-owned property) may be used for residential purposes. This requirement, however, does not apply if the district is created pursuant to a petition of the landowners. Currently residential land use makes up 32% of the total downtown study area, which is the largest land use category. However, the district boundaries could be calculated to exclude more residential areas, which are not slated for change at any rate.
- A reinvestment zone may not contain property that cumulatively would exceed 15 percent of the total appraised property value within the city and its industrial districts. Currently, the downtown study area is 6.5% of the total appraised value of Rockdale’s city limits.
- A city also may not create a reinvestment zone or

change the boundaries of an existing zone if the zone would contain more than 15 percent of the total appraised value of real property taxable by a county or school district.

**Recommendation** - Evaluate the benefits of creating a Tax Increment Finance District in more detail, especially calculating the potential revenue that could be generated. Evaluate whether Milam County might participate in the TIF program.

**Public Improvement District (PID)** - Chapter 372 of the Texas Local Government Code permits the formation of PIDs, which allows a city and/or county to levy and collect special assessments on property that is within the city or within its extraterritorial jurisdiction. Funds generated by the PID tax are invested back in the district and may be used to fund the following types of improvements:

- Water, waste water, health and sanitation, or drainage improvements
- Street and sidewalk improvements
- Mass transit improvements
- Parking improvements
- Library improvements
- Park, recreation, and cultural improvements
- Landscaping and other aesthetic improvements
- Art installation
- Creation of pedestrian malls
- Similar improvements
- Supplemental safety services, including public safety and security services
- Supplemental business-related services for the improvement of the district.

Subchapter A of Chapter 372 of the Texas Local Government Code outlines the procedures by which a PID must be established.

A majority of the taxpayers in the proposed PID area must petition the local government to form a PID. This petition may be initiated by either the property owners or the local government, but still must be

signed by at least 50 percent of property owners in the proposed district, or owners of at least 50% of the land area. The petition must also state:

- The general nature of the proposed improvement;
- The estimated cost of the improvement;
- The boundaries of the proposed assessment district;
- The proposed method of assessment;
- The proposed apportionment of cost between the PID and the municipality;
- The management of the district;
- That the persons signing the petition request or concur with the establishment of the district; and
- That an advisory body may be established to develop and recommend an improvement plan to the governing body of the municipality.

Additionally, before the district is established, a public hearing must be held to advise the community of the nature of the district.

Once the PID is established, actual construction of

any improvements may not start till after the 20th day after authorization of the PID. This allows any public comment to be submitted to the municipality.

The PID advisory body must maintain and annually update a service plan for the PID, which must be presented to and approved by the municipality. The service plan must cover a minimum five-year period and define annual indebtedness and projected costs for proposed improvements.

Money generated for public improvements in a PID are done so through assessments on properties in the PID. An assessment plan must be included in the annual service plan. Exempt municipal or county properties in the PID area must pay assessments to the district. Assessments may be determined in the following ways:

- Equally per square foot or front foot;
- According to the value of the property as determined by the governing body, with or without regard to improvements on the property; or
- In any other manner that results in imposing equal shares of the cost on property similarly benefitted.

Public improvement districts have been created

On an annual basis, cities must prepare a Service Plan for the PID that identifies the potential budget and outlines how the funds will be spent. The table below illustrates how different PIDs distribute their budget among the various services. While the scale of these is different from Downtown Rockdale, the revenue generated may still be beneficial.

<b>Table 1 - Distribution of Budget Among Services</b>				
	Austin	Dallas	San Antonio	Fort Worth
2010-2011 Budget	\$2.6 million	\$6.7 million	\$3.4 million	\$2.8 million
Public Safety	31%	37%	24%	4%
Maintenance	14%	-	40%	46%
Streetscaping	3%	-	-	-
Transportation	-	25%	-	15%
Landscaping	-	-	8%	part of maintenance
Park Improvements	4%	17%	-	-
Marketing/Promotion	12%	-	4%	20%
Communication	10%	13%	-	-
Economic Development	11%	-	-	-
Administration	15%	6%	24%	15%

throughout Texas under Chapter 372 since its adoption in 1986. Below are examples of downtown PIDs in Texas.

**Downtown Austin PID** - Established in 1993, the Downtown Austin PID finances enhancements in the downtown area. Property owners pay a special assessment of \$0.10 per \$100 of value for services such as graffiti and litter removal, tourism and parking maps, the downtown Austin Rangers (downtown security), and streetscape and street design improvements.

**Downtown Dallas District** - The priority for the Downtown Dallas PID is public safety, funding a Downtown Safety Patrol. The PID also helps fund landscaping, streetscaping, trash and graffiti removal, and downtown marketing and events. The special assessment is \$0.1190 per \$100 of appraised value.

**Centro San Antonio PID** - The Centro San Antonio PID was established in 1999 to provide additional services and improvements in Downtown San Antonio as a supplement to services provided by the City of San Antonio. Programs of this PID include an ambassador program assisting visitors and residents; a streetscaping program; and a maintenance program. The special assessment is \$0.12 per \$100 of appraised value.

**Downtown Fort Worth PID #1** - In 1986, the first PID in Texas was established in Downtown Fort Worth. Property owners in the district pay a special assessment of \$0.11 per \$100 of value for maintenance, landscaping, promotions for special events, marketing, market research, transportation, parking, and enhanced security.

**Recommendation** - Creating a PID is strongly recommended as a potential revenue source to supplement or be used in lieu of a TIF district. A PID can fund additional public improvements within the district as well as safety programs and marketing campaigns to reinforce Downtown Rockdale as a destination.

**Citywide Bond Funding** - A few of the improvements proposed for downtown can be considered as community-wide investments that benefit all of the citizens of Rockdale. These include the creation of gateways into the downtown area, improvements along sidewalks and streets in the area, and new civic facilities such as Wolf Park improvements.

**Recommendation** - Consider future bond programs within the next ten years to fund key Downtown Rockdale improvements.

## Development Incentives

Chapter 380 of the Texas Local Government Code allows the granting of certain economic development incentives by cities to encourage developers to build in their jurisdiction. Development incentives typically take the form of property tax abatements, loans or grants, commitments for infrastructure, or sales tax rebates.

**Recommendation** - Develop a formal Chapter 380 policy that will guide the use of Chapter 380 incentive funding (if not already in place).

**Property Tax Abatement** - A tax abatement is an agreement between a taxpayer and a taxing unit that exempts all or part of the increase in the value of the real property and/or tangible personal property from taxation for a period not to exceed ten years. Abatements recognize the potential for other benefits of property development other than increased property value, such as job creation and sales tax revenue. Abatements are typically tied to job creation and value of the investment.

Tax abatements would not work well with a TIF district, since a TIF relies on increasing property values to generate revenue while a tax abatement essentially freezes the property value.

**Recommendation** - If alternative sources for funding public improvements are accepted (such as a PID), then property tax abatements are recommended in lieu of the creation of a TIF district to serve as a significant incentive for specific investments in the area. However, without identifying a funding source for public improvements, the TIF district is deemed to be a better method than tax abatement for increasing investment in the district.

**Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive** - The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive program encourages private sector rehabilitation of historic buildings. According to the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service, current tax incentives for preservation include:

- A 20% tax credit for the certified rehabilitation of

certified historic structures<sup>1</sup>. The credit is available for properties rehabilitated for commercial, industrial, agricultural, or rental residential purposes, but not for properties used exclusively as the owner's private residence.

- A 10% tax credit for the rehabilitation of non-historic, non-residential buildings built before 1936. The credit is available only to buildings rehabilitated for non-residential uses.

In all cases, the rehabilitation must be substantial (determined by value of rehabilitation) and must involve a depreciable building.

**Recommendation** - Promote the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive program to encourage historic preservation of buildings in downtown.

## Potential Grant Opportunities

**Transportation Enhancement Grants** - Federal enhancement funding allocated to the State of Texas could be used to fund streetscape or pedestrian mobility improvements in downtown, particularly along Cameron Ave and Main Street connecting the Kay Theater and the Railroad Depot.

**Historic Renovation Grants** - The Texas Historical Commission offers a variety of grants for preservation of historic buildings and areas in Texas. The Texas Preservation Trust Fund Grant is a matching grant awarded on a one-to-one match basis and can be used for acquisition, survey, restoration, and preservation of a site, or for the planning and education of preserving historic properties or archeological sites. The Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program provides partial matching grants to Texas counties for the restoration of historic county courthouses.

**Future Stimulus Grants** - As other state and federal grants become available, the Rockdale Downtown Association and the City of Rockdale should pursue monies to implement components of the Downtown Master Plan.

## Staffing

As discussed in the Recommendations section, having a person dedicated to pursuing the recommendations set forth in this master plan is vital.

That person would help coordinate events, enlist support for activities, focus on grants and other key funding opportunities, and continue to serve as a liaison between the City, MDD, Chamber and the Rockdale Downtown Association.

Given the size of the downtown and Rockdale as a whole, the efforts of this staffing member might require 15 to 25 hours per week.

This master plan recommends that a person with previous downtown experience, but also with grant and event experience be hired. That person might be funded by the City of Rockdale, the Chamber of Commerce or by the Municipal Development District, or by a combination of all three entities.

## Plan Updating

As with any master plan, this plan should be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure that it addresses current needs in the Downtown and the City as a whole. Reviews every two years are recommended, and more significant updates can be prepared every five years.

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<sup>1</sup> A certified historic structure is a building that is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or a building that is located in a registered historic district and certified by the National Park Service as contributing to the historic significance of that district.

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# Appendix

## **DOWNTOWN INTERCEPT QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **Tejas Art & Book Festival and Annual Auto & Bike Show, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

A total of 70 surveys were filled out and returned at the *Tejas Art & Book Festival and Annual Auto & Bike Show* on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 in downtown Rockdale. Below is a summary of the responses of that survey.

#### **Are you a resident of Rockdale, or visitor?**

- 60% of surveys received were from residents near or in the City of Rockdale
- 20% of surveys received were from residents of some other area in Milam County
- 18.6% of surveys received were from residents of an area outside of Milam County

#### **Attended event before?**

- 63% of survey respondents had attended the event before and 31% had not

#### **How did you hear about the event?**

- A large majority of those surveyed heard about the event through a local media source, including newspaper or radio (38.6%) or through an organization or business entity (18.5%).
- Other forms of publicity that drew attendance included school promotion; mail out; and walk or drive by.

#### **How often do you come to Downtown Rockdale?**

- 67% of the survey respondents said they come to Rockdale at least once a week. Of these 47 respondents, 37 (78.7%) are from the city or immediate vicinity and 17% are from the Milam County area (outside of the near-city area)

#### **Normally, what is your reason for visiting downtown Rockdale?**

- The top reasons for typically visiting Rockdale include (in order) shopping; eating out; attending a special event or festival; and visiting a business.
- Only 1 survey respondent answered that they normally come to downtown Rockdale to visit the museum.

#### **What would make you visit downtown Rockdale more frequently?**

- Festivals or special events: 48.6%
- More places to eat: 45.7%
- Different shops: 44.3%
- More entertainment or music venues: 40%
- Public gathering places such as parks or plazas: 28.6%
- Promotions to attract you to downtown: 21.4%

#### **What do you like about downtown Rockdale?**

- character or feeling of downtown Rockdale (referring to the hometown/small town feel) (28.6%)
- people (22.9%)
- variety of businesses (15.7%)
- Other answers that received repetitive responses include events, the cleanliness, specific businesses, museums, the preservation of buildings, and the library

**What do you not like about downtown Rockdale?**

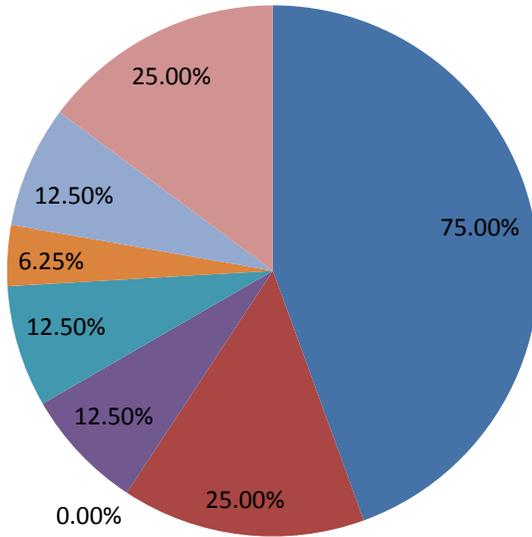
- related to a lack of destination or things to do (12 responses)
- the infrastructure (including quality and ease of it) (7)
- traffic through downtown (4)
- Other answers include Christmas decorations; building conditions; no promotion; condition of entrance; police trap; Walmart; not clean

**Suggestions to improve downtown Rockdale?**

- Fill empty businesses/attract businesses (8)
- Improve quality of built environment/clean up vacant properties (3)
- Family/youth activity opportunities (3)
- Other answers include art district; water feature; housing; common theme; parking; parade; traffic; Christmas decorations; walk/bike path

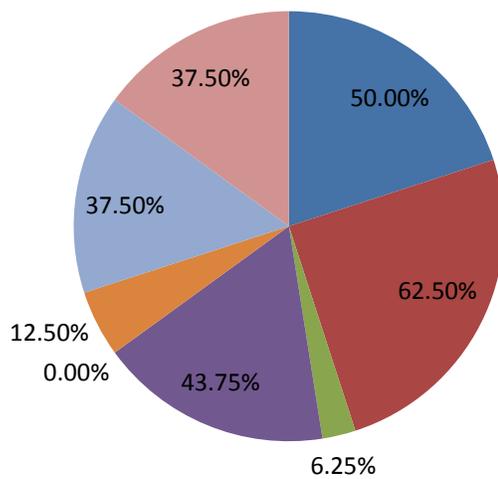
# DOWNTOWN CUSTOMER SURVEY RESULTS

What was the primary purpose of your visit to downtown Rockdale?



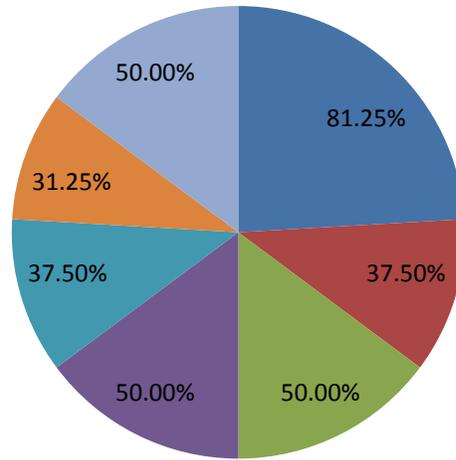
- Visit certain business
- General shopping
- Visit museum
- Visit library
- Just passing through
- Work downtown
- Visit friend
- Other

For what other reasons do you typically visit Downtown Rockdale?



- Eat out
- Shop
- Sight-see
- Visit business
- Work there
- Visit business
- Festival or special event
- Other

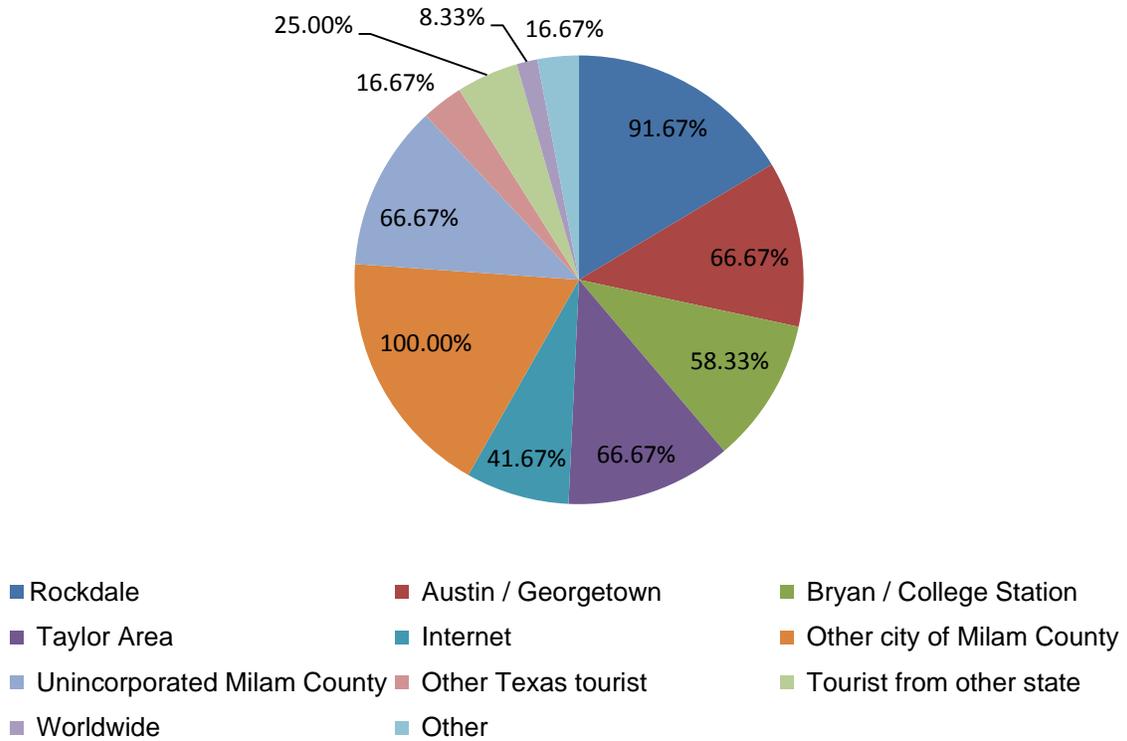
## What would make you visit downtown Rockdale more frequently?



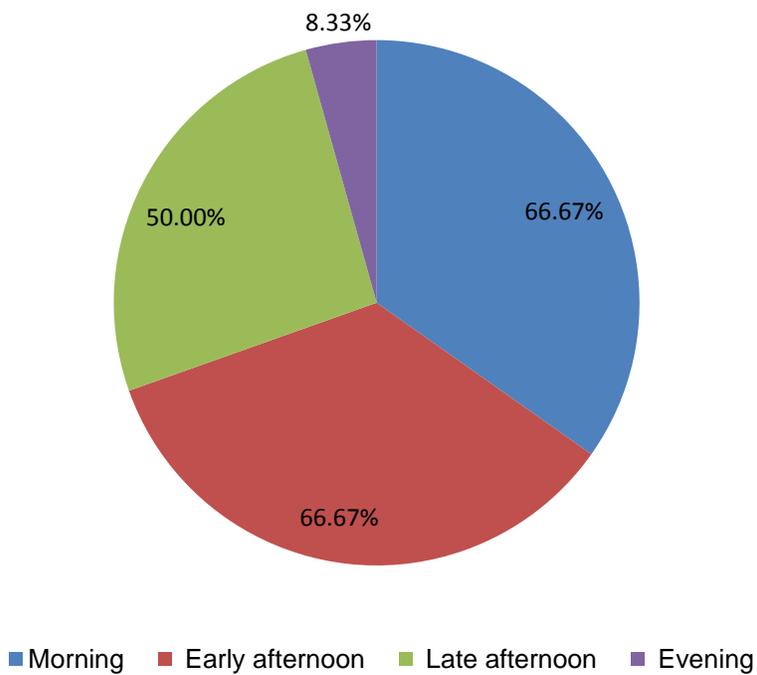
- More places to eat
- Different shops
- More places to shop
- Festivals or special events
- Promotions to attracts you to downtown
- Public gathering places
- Entertainment venues

# BUSINESS OWNER SURVEY RESPONSES (17 TOTAL)

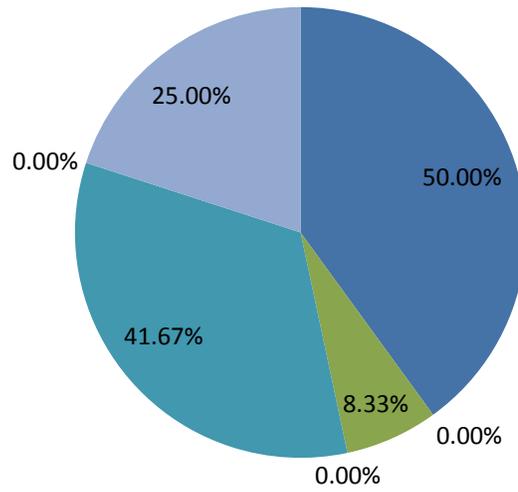
My customers come from:



What time of day is typically the busiest for your business?

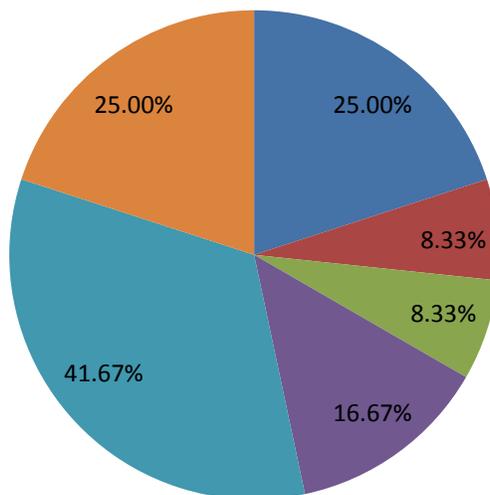


## What are your feelings on your current store hours?



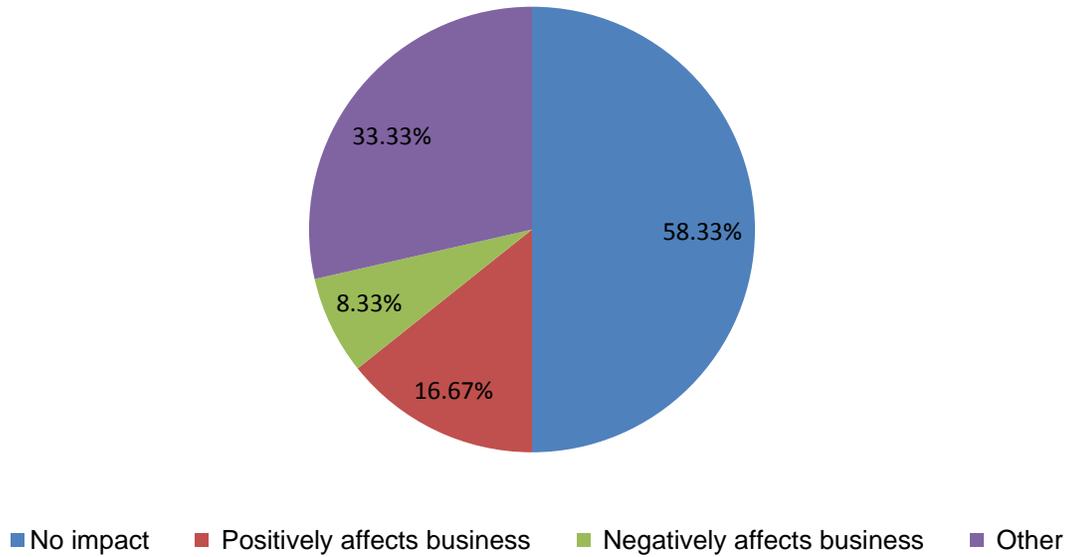
- Open all the hours I need to be
- Should be open more but can't afford staff
- Would be open more if I were sure of sales
- Other
- Can't be open more for personal reasons
- Should be open more but can't find good staff
- Would be open more if everyone else were

## If you could change your store hours, would you:

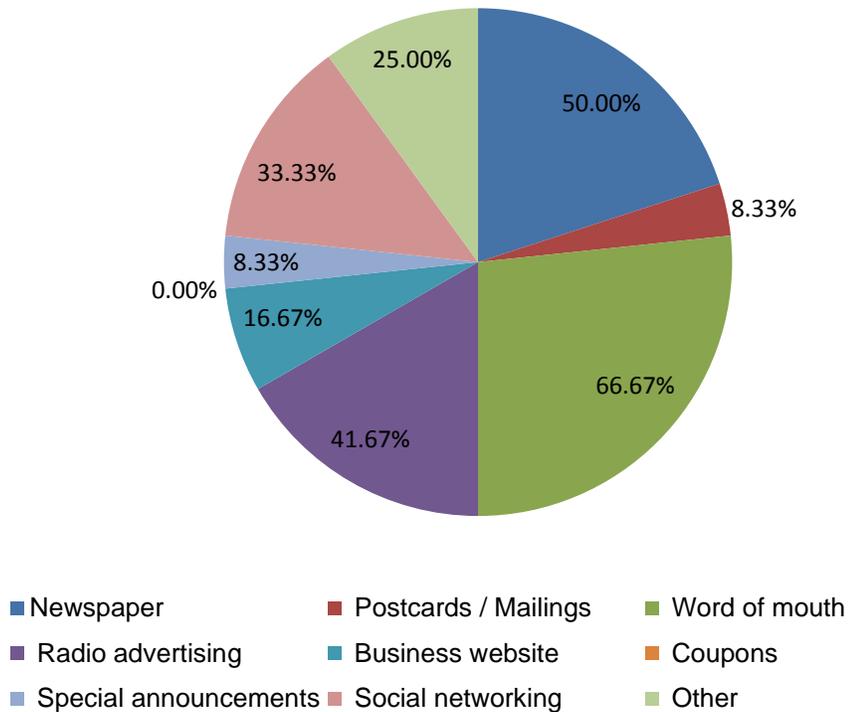


- Open more hours
- Open different days of the week
- Open evenings
- Expand hours on the weekend
- Wouldn't change store hours
- Other

**How do events such as the Tejas Book Festival, Annual Car Show, and Christmas Parade affect your business?**

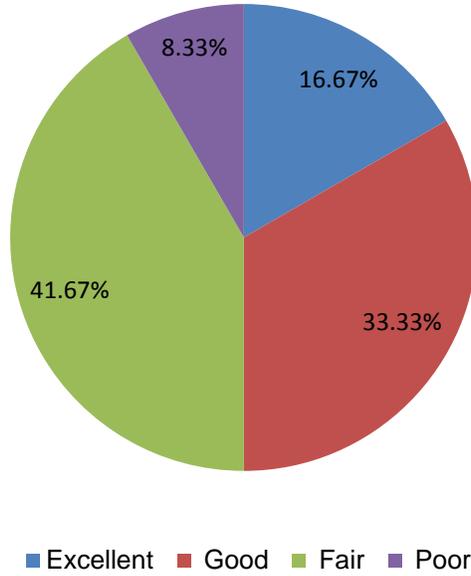


**What type of marketing strategies do you currently use that are most effective for your business:**

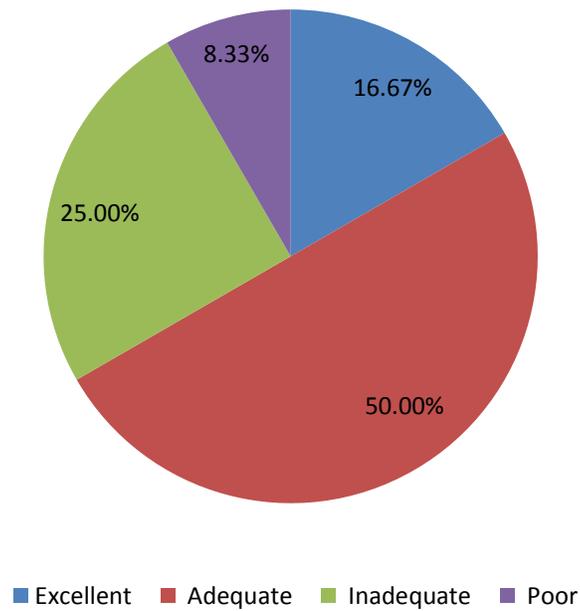


## Doing business in downtown Rockdale

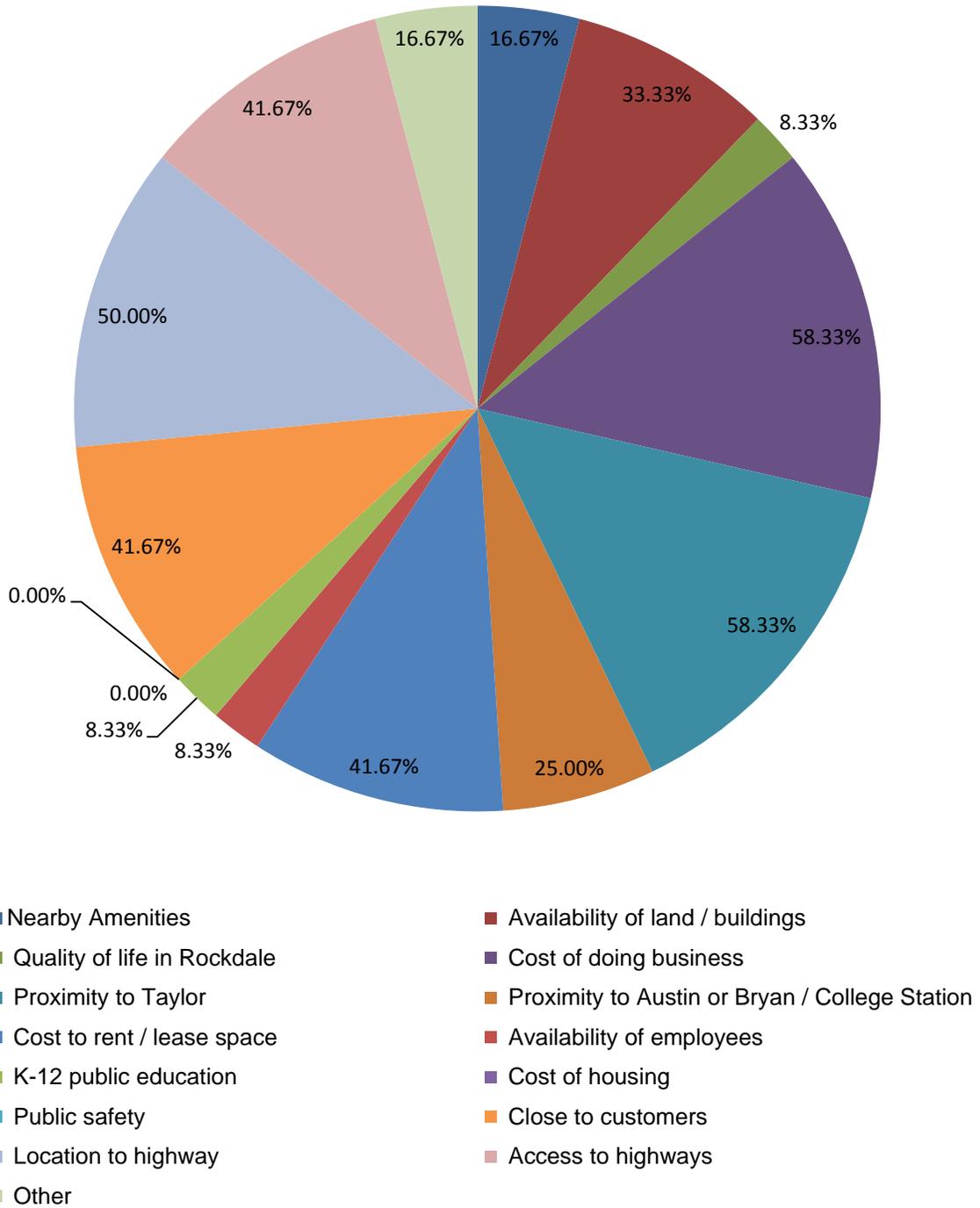
Overall, how would you rate downtown Rockdale as a place to do business?



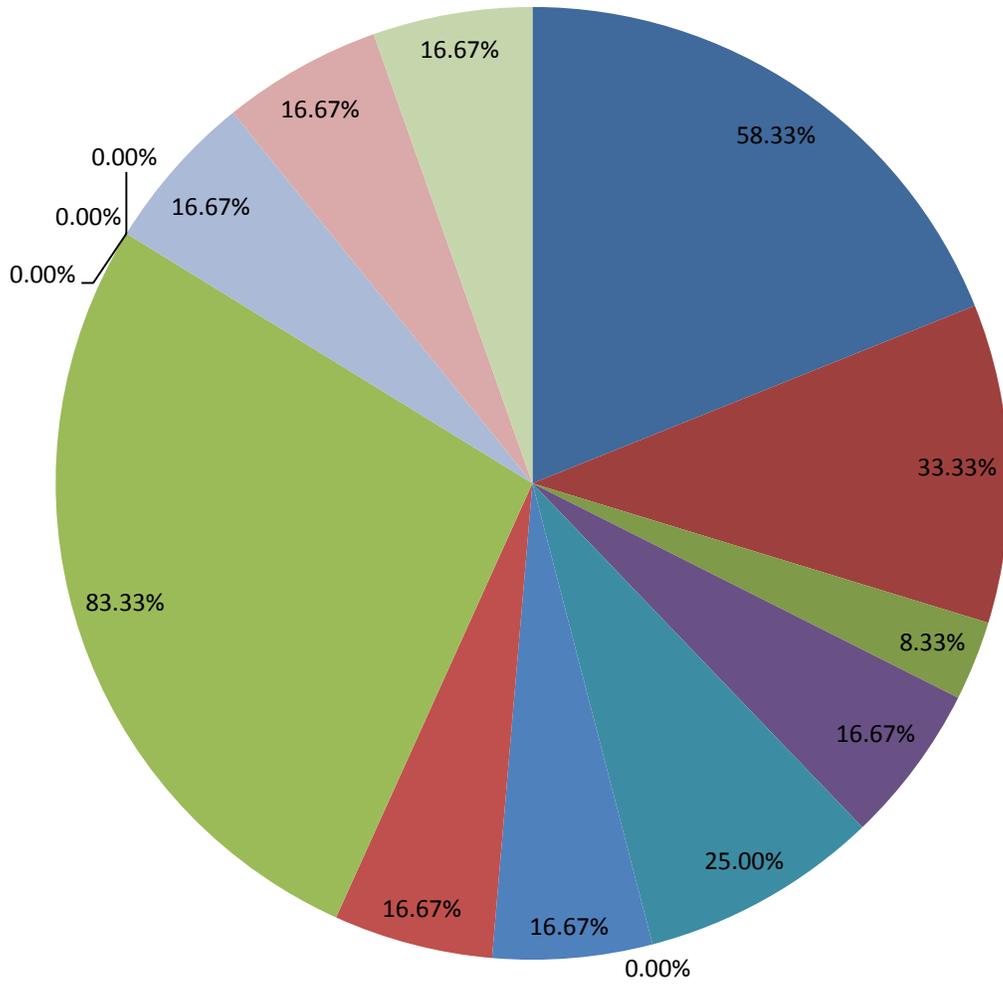
How would you rate access to parking for your business?



# What are the advantages of your location in Rockdale?

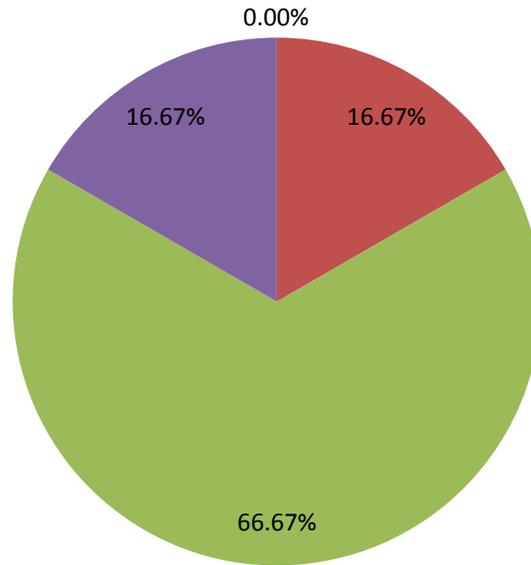


## What are the challenges facing your business today?



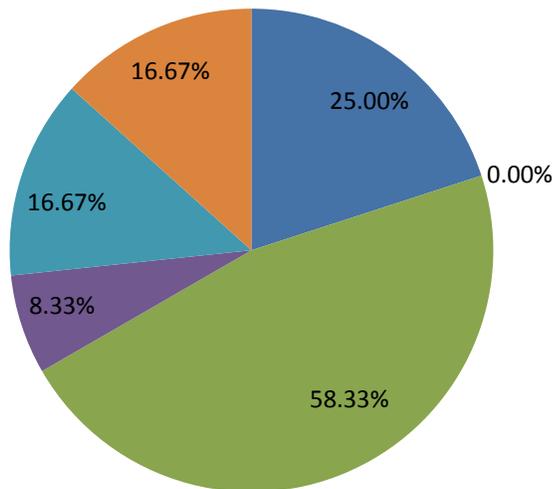
- Insufficient customer base / sales
- Access to financing
- Transportation / parking access
- General operating costs
- Current economic conditions
- Computer / technology issues
- Marketing my business
- Other
- Property or space constraints
- Codes or regulations
- Competition
- Insurance costs
- Availability of employees
- Access to suppliers
- Façade improvements

**How would you characterize your business' activity level over the last 12 months?**



- Business rapidly expanding
- Business moderately growing
- Holding your own / business is stable
- Declining business activity

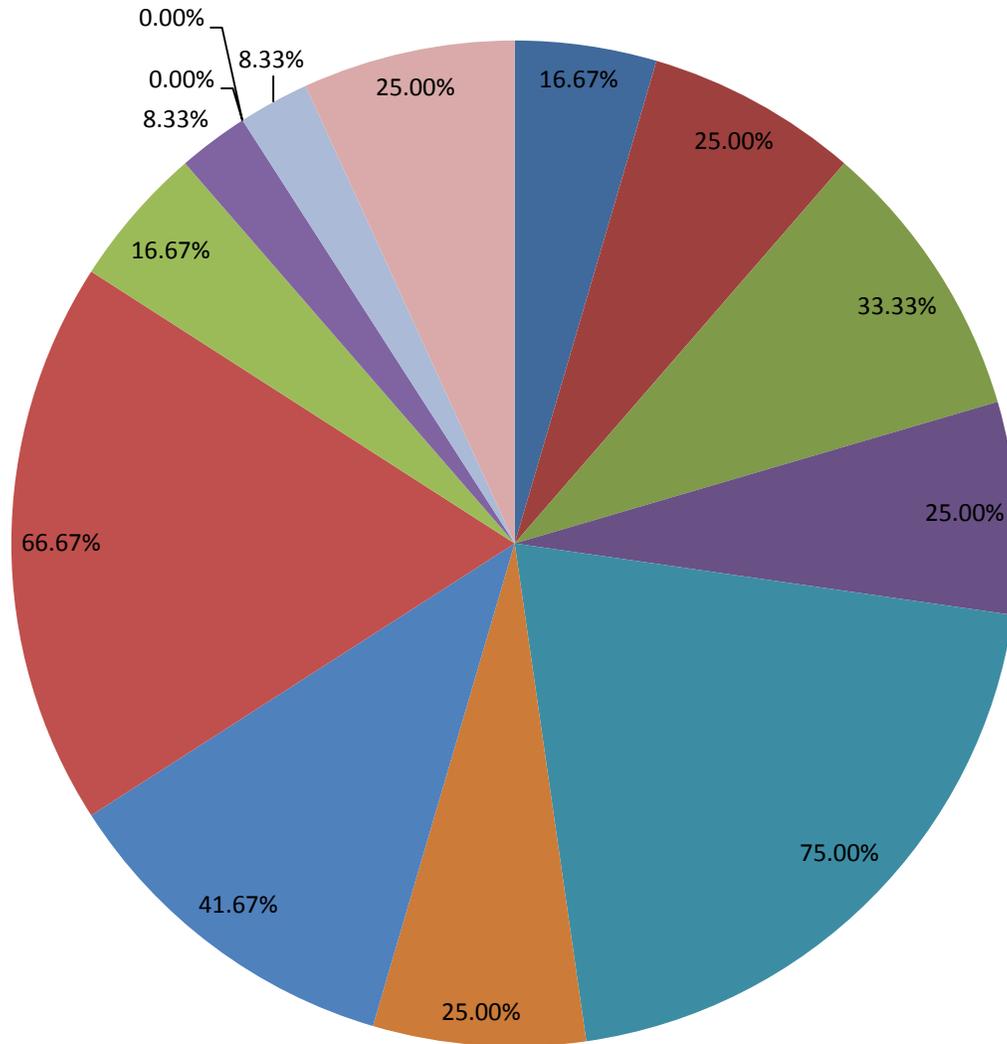
**Which description best characterizes your plans for your business in the next 12 months?**



- Plan to expand business
- Plan to reduce business
- No plans to change
- Plan to sell business
- Plan to relocate business
- Uncertain

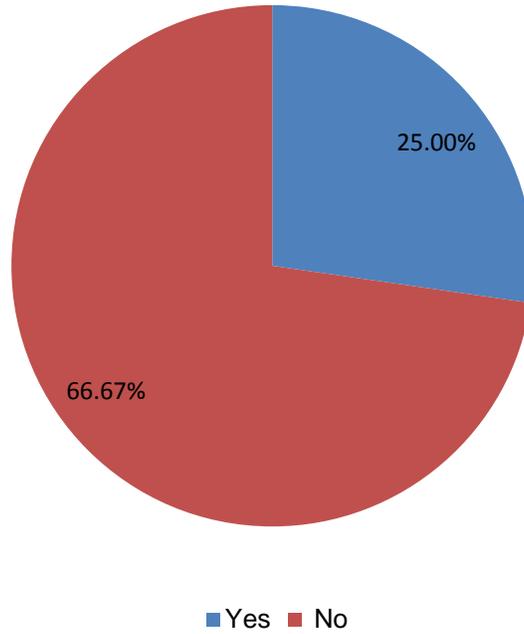
# Business Resources

What would help your business grown and succeed?

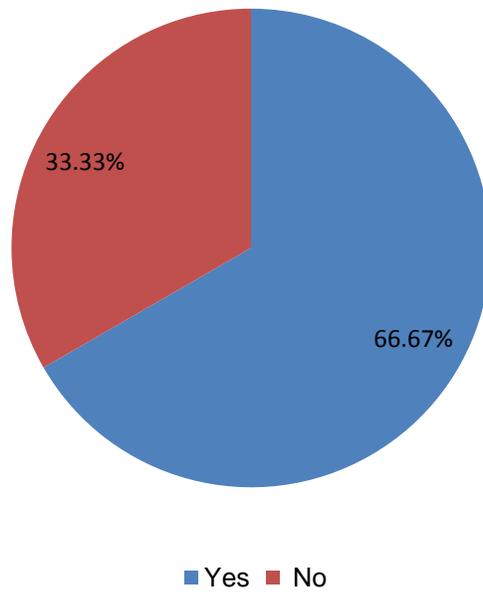


- Building improvements
- Financing
- Information on business planning / marketing
- Information on local market characteristics
- Attractiveness of downtown Rockdale
- Improved safety in downtown Rockdale
- More customer parking near business
- Increase in customer base
- Business networking groups
- Lower operating costs
- Improved internet
- No assistance needed
- Not sure
- Other

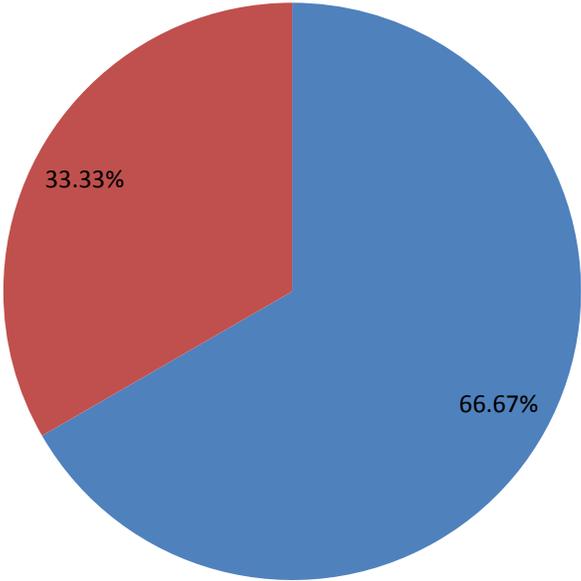
**Do you have trouble finding qualified employees to fill your workforce needs?**



**Are you a member of the Rockdale Downtown Association?**



**Are you a member of the Rockdale Chamber of Commerce?**



■ Yes ■ No