

***Balcones Heights Master Plan***  
***Balcones Heights, Texas***

***Adopted by City Council (August 3, 2009)***

## **Acknowledgments**

Thanks to all of the following who helped with the Balcones Heights Master Plan.

### **CITY COUNCIL**

Suzanne de Leon, Mayor

Charles Matthies, Mayor Pro-Tem

Miguel C. Valverde, Place 1

Linda Pohl, Place 2

Lamar Gillian, Place 4

Bennie Cass, Place 5

### **PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**

Hank Cortez

Lili Cruz

Beryl Jones

George Moellering

Betty Pfeiffer

David Sellars

Madeline Slay, Chair

### **REDEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE**

Suzanne de Leon, Mayor, Balcones Heights

Pamela Hodges, Chair, Balcones Heights CVB

Lorenzo Nastasi, Chair, Visitor Initiatives Director, Balcones Heights

Sean Pate, City Administrator, Balcones Heights

Madeline Slay, Chair, Balcones Heights Planning & Zoning Commission

Texas Department of Transportation

VIA Metropolitan Transit

**CONSULTANTS**

Terra Design Group

## **CITY OF BALCONES HEIGHTS**

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| <b>Chapter 1. Context for Revitalization</b>   | <b>1</b>      |
| 1.1 Balcones Heights History and Legacies  | 1             |
| 1.2 Balcones Heights and the Marketplace   | 3             |
| 1.3 Rapid Transit and Transit-oriented Development   | 6             |
| 1.4 Roadway Access to Balcones Heights   | 14            |
| 1.5 Property Characteristics in Balcones Heights   | 15            |
| <br><b>Chapter 2. The Balcones Heights Master Plan</b>   | <br><b>21</b> |
| 2.1 Recommendation 1. Initiate Bus Rapid Transit and Fredericksburg<br>Road Improvements                           | 21            |
| 2.2 Recommendation 2. Development of the Crossroads District   | 24            |
| 2.3 Recommendation 3. Development and Redevelopment of the<br>Fredericksburg Road Corridor                         | 25            |
| 2.4 Recommendation 4. Development and Redevelopment of the<br>Higher Density Residential Zone along Gentleman Road | 26            |
| 2.5 Recommendation 5. Redevelopment and/or Conservation of the<br>Single-Family Residential Zone                   | 26            |
| 2.6 Recommendation 6. Creation of a Comprehensive Parks and<br>Trails System                                       | 27            |
| 2.7 Recommendation 7. Providing Linkages to East Balcones Heights  | 28            |
| <br><b>Chapter 3. The Crossroads District</b>  | <br><b>29</b> |
| 3.1 Transit-oriented Development   | 30            |
| 3.2 Transit-oriented Development with a BRT Station at the<br>Crossroads Blvd. Intersection                        | 32            |
| 3.3 Development Potential at the Crossroads Boulevard Intersection   | 35            |
| 3.4 Potential Uses in the Crossroads Blvd. Station Area  | 37            |
| 3.5 A Non-BRT Alternative  | 39            |
| <br><b>Chapter 4. Mixed-use Corridors</b>  | <br><b>42</b> |
| 4.1 Building Placement   | 43            |
| 4.2 Parking and Services   | 44            |
| 4.3 Site Access  | 44            |
| 4.4 Landscaping  | 45            |
| 4.5 Buildings  | 47            |

|                   |   |           |
|-------------------|---|-----------|
| 4.6               | Building Signs                                      | 52        |
| <b>Chapter 5.</b> | <b>Commercial Renovation</b>                        | <b>57</b> |
| 5.1               | Definition: Substantial Construction or Renovation  | 57        |
| 5.2               | Placement for Additional Buildings on a Property    | 57        |
| 5.3               | Site  | 58        |
| 5.4               | Buildings   | 62        |
| 5.5               | Building Signs                                      | 66        |
| 5.6               | Surrounding Environment                             | 70        |
| <b>Chapter 6.</b> | <b>Townhouse and Mid-rise Housing</b>               | <b>72</b> |
| 6.1               | Housing Density and Types                           | 72        |
| 6.2               | Building Setbacks                                   | 73        |
| 6.3               | Orientation to the Street                           | 73        |
| 6.4               | Garages, Parking Areas and Driveways                | 74        |
| 6.5               | Scale   | 74        |
| 6.6               | Materials   | 75        |
| <b>Chapter 7.</b> | <b>Parks, Open Space, and Trails System</b>         | <b>76</b> |
| 7.1               | Purpose   | 77        |
| 7.2               | Current Conditions                                  | 78        |
| 7.3               | Parks, Open Space, and Trails Goals                 | 79        |
| 7.4               | Recommendations                                     | 80        |
| <b>Chapter 8.</b> | <b>Strategies and Tools</b>                         | <b>86</b> |
| 8.1               | Organization, Management and Promotion              | 86        |
| 8.2               | Planning, Development, and Redevelopment Strategies | 87        |
| 8.3               | Implementation Tools                                | 89        |

## Chapter 1. Context for Revitalization

### 1.1 Balcones Heights History and Legacies

Throughout its history, citizens of Balcones Heights have seized opportunities, taken risks, and been pioneers of change. In 1765, Spanish explorer Bernardo de Miranda y Flores encountered a rising series of hills outside of San Antonio. He named them *Los Balcones*. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when new subdivisions were formed, the developers drew on the area's history, proclaiming the settlement *Balcones Heights*.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1840s, stagecoach transportation required a straighter and higher route, and as a result, Fredericksburg Road was surveyed and developed. The route was also used as a military roadway when the US Army established Camp Verde in Kerr County in 1855. With the advent of cross country automotive travel in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Fredericksburg Road was incorporated into the *Old Spanish Trail Highway*, which traversed the United States from California to Florida.<sup>2</sup>

After World War II, the United States embarked on an era of massive suburban expansion. Fueled by the VA and FHA loans, the 40-hour work week, and better highway access, areas like Balcones Heights began to develop. By the late 1940s, the first houses in a subdivision named *Country Gentleman's Estates* were being completed on roadways named Gentleman Street and Lady Street and Drives named Pleasant, Leisure and Happy.<sup>3</sup>

By 1948, residents resisting annexation by San Antonio incorporated Balcones Heights. They were concerned that the larger city could not provide adequate utilities and services to the area. In response, members of the San Antonio City Council voted to withhold services and any new utility connections from Balcones Heights.<sup>4</sup> The two communities grew separately until 1955, when the suburban growth of San Antonio



*Dellville Subdivision near Balcones Heights in 1955 (Fisher 18)*

extended all the way to the Balcones Heights border. <sup>5</sup>

The advent of the national interstate highway system fueled more growth and development. By 1959, construction of the junction of I-10 and I-410 was well underway, making Balcones Heights a major crossroads for the San Antonio region. The new highway access was the catalyst for major new commercial development that culminated in the *Wonderland Shopping City* of San Antonio in 1961.<sup>6</sup> It was refurbished in 1987 and is now the *Crossroads of San Antonio Mall*.



John Wayne in Balcones Heights for "The Alamo" premier (Fisher 26)



*The Wonderland Mall in the Late 1960s at the Intersection of Interstates 410 and 10 (Fisher 28)*

Over time, Balcones Heights has developed its own infrastructure, as well as more refined public services. It is now a major transit hub in the San Antonio region and awaits the development of the proposed bus rapid transit system (BRT) in 2012.

Today, the city is home to a population of approximately 3,000 residents in a 0.7 square mile area. Building on its legacies, it is also a major commercial destination that is poised once again for change at the crossroads of San Antonio.



### ***Important Milestones in Balcones Heights***

- **1756:** Area named *Los Balcones* by Spanish explorer
- **1840s:** *Fredericksburg Road* surveyed

- **1929: Old Spanish Trail opened**
- **1940s: Country Gentleman Estates subdivision first developed**
- **1948: Balcones Heights incorporated**
- **1955: San Antonio suburban expansion meets Balcones Heights**
- **1959: I-10 and I-410 under construction**
- **1961: Wonderland Shopping City developed (later renamed)**
- **1987: Renovation occurs on current Crossroads of San Antonio Mall**
- **2008 Substantial Completion I-10/I-410 Interchange**
- **2012: BRT along Fredericksburg Road slated to open**

### **Historical References**

- 1 Spearing, Darwin, *Roadside Geology of Texas* Mountain Press Publishing Co, 1991, p.63.  
Tyler, Ron, ed., *"Bernardo de Miranda y Flores," The New Handbook of Texas*, Texas State Historical Association, 1966, vol. 4, p.769.
- 2 Fisher, Lewis, *Balcones Heights, A Crossroads of San Antonio*, Maverick Publishing Company, 1999, p.2.
- 3 Fisher, Lewis, p.9.
- 4 "SA Declares War on New Suburb," *Express*, November 18, 1948, p.1
- 5 Fisher, p.18
- 6 Fisher, p.26

## **1.2 Balcones Heights and the Marketplace**

The prospect for change and revitalization of Balcones Heights is dependent, in part, on the ability to promote major retail and mixed-use development. That, in turn, is dependent on an understanding of the population and employment characteristics of Balcones Heights and its surrounding area.

### **Population and Households**

The number of households and the number of people living in a surrounding area are influential in attracting appropriate retail or commercial development. The 2000 United States Census, as extrapolated, indicates that over 140,000 people live within a three mile radius of Balcones Heights; and over 65,000 people live within a two mile radius. The southwest quadrant of this area comprises the largest number of people, while the smallest number is in the northeast quadrant.

The number of households within the same area, however, exhibits a slightly different characteristic. Of the more than 68,000 households within the three mile radius, the northwest quadrant contains the largest number of households at approximately 18,000. The southeast quadrant has the second largest number of households.



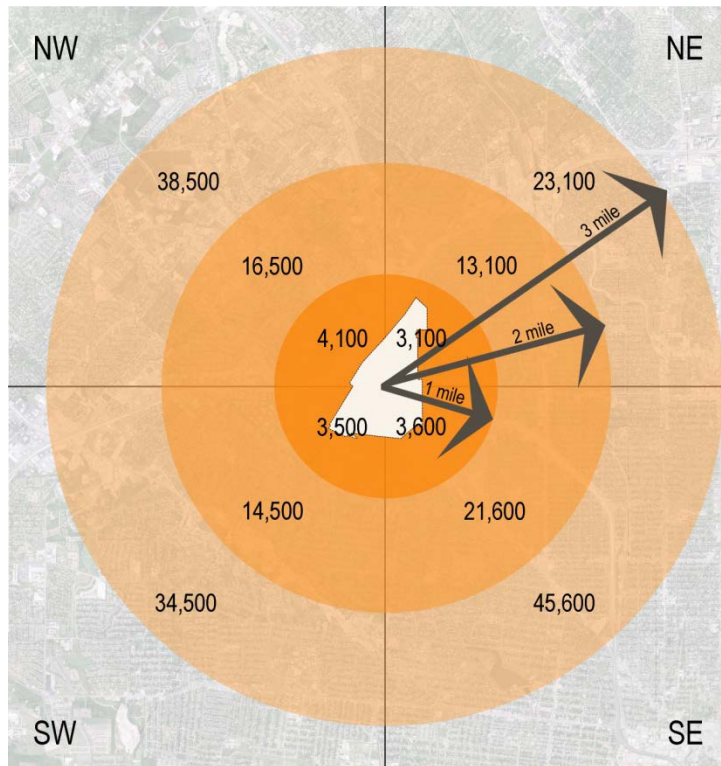
---

# Master Plan

## City of Balcones Heights

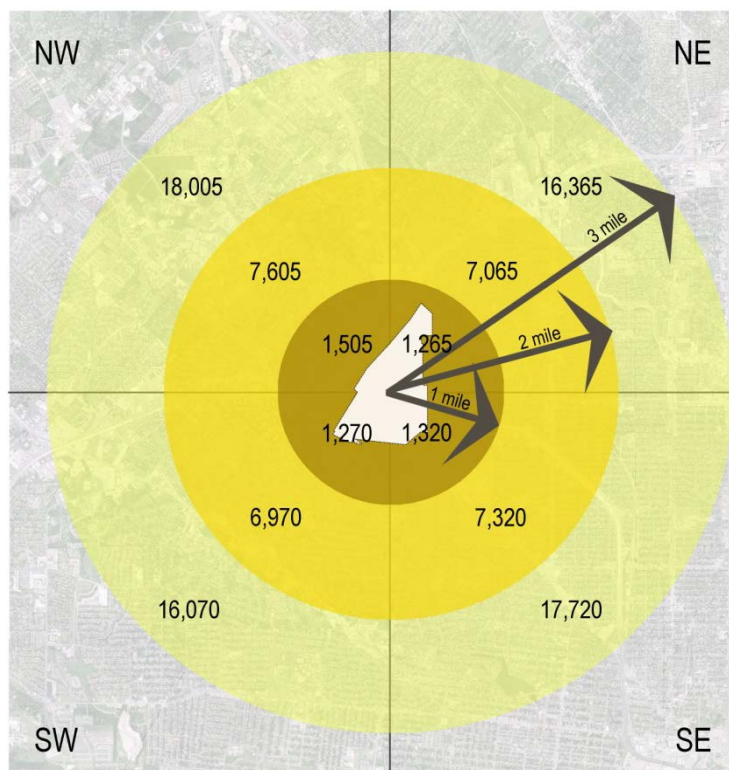
---

These statistics are consistent with observations “on the ground.” The western quadrants typically consist of suburban style housing with family sizes that are similar. In the northeast, however, the households are typical of an area with larger numbers of rental housing and senior citizens. The southeast area is populated by larger families.



**POPULATION**  
1 Mile Radius - 14,200  
2 Mile Radius - 65,700  
3 Mile Radius - 141,700

Population totals within radii and quadrants are cumulative.



**HOUSING UNITS**  
1 Mile Radius - 5,360  
2 Mile Radius - 28,960  
3 Mile Radius - 68,160

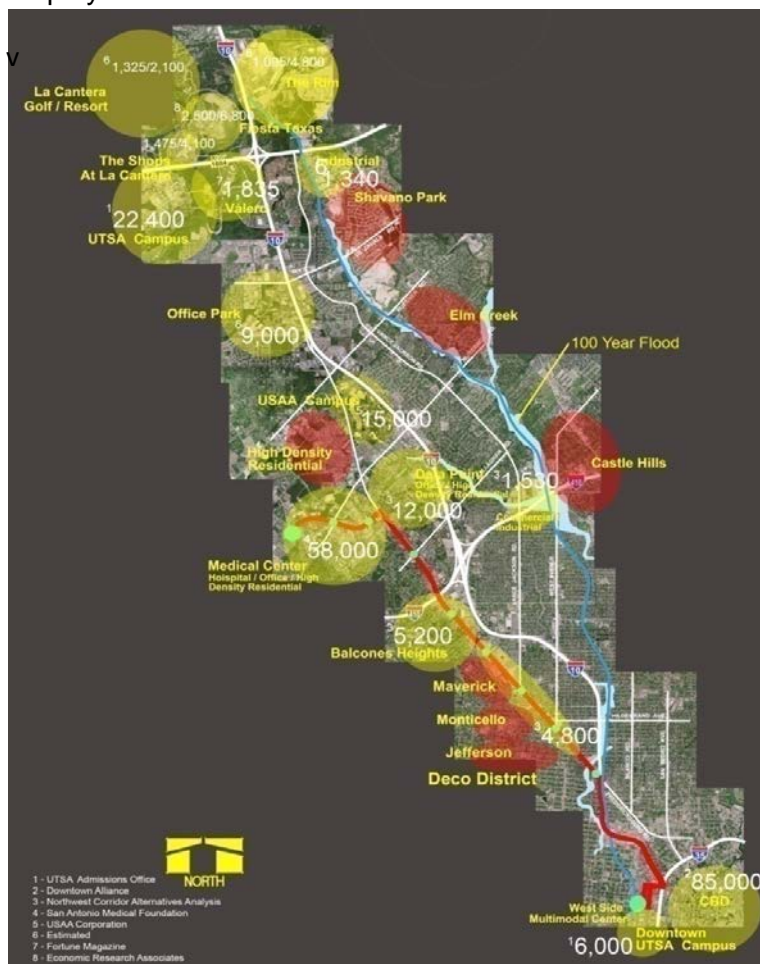
Housing Unit totals within radii and quadrants are cumulative.

### Major Employment Centers

Development and revitalization are also supported by proximity to employment centers. In a region that is expected to promote transit access in the future, proximity to jobs helps to fuel residential development, as well as recreational and entertainment venues. The accompanying map illustrates the proposed alignment of the BRT corridor on Fredericksburg Road, along with major employment centers that align the corridor.

Major employment areas and their approximate employment numbers include: the Medical Center - 58,000 employees (as reported by the Medical Center); Data Point district - 12,000 employees; Balcones Heights - 5,200 employees; the Deco District – 4,800 employees, the University of Texas San Antonio, Downtown campus - 6,000 employees and students; and the San Antonio Central Business District - 85,000 employees.

In a proposed extension of BRT to the north, additional employment areas will be served. They include the USAA campus – 15,000 employees; office park development – 9,000 employees; Valero – over 1,800 employees; and the UTSA campus – 22,400 employees and students.



Major Employment Centers along BRT Corridor



USAA



Medical Center



Downtown

### 1.3 Rapid Transit and Transit-oriented Development

**Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** generally refers to a variety of rubber tire rapid transportation systems with improved infrastructure, vehicles and scheduling that provides a higher level of service than a traditional bus line. Each BRT system utilizes unique improvements that allow it to fit within its regional and local context. The goal of BRT systems is to approach the quality of a light rail transit system at a much lower cost. The term Bus Rapid Transit, or BRT, is most common in North America, Europe and Australia.

Bus rapid transit systems frequently have their own rights-of way, such as rail transit systems. Sometimes they run in an elevated configuration or in underground tunnels. Vehicles can be typical busses, articulated busses, or multiple vehicles coupled together like trains. The design of the vehicle may also be unique and streamlined, only vaguely looking like a traditional bus. Transit speeds of BRT systems range from 12 to 30 miles per hour. This speed is comparable to many light rail transit systems.

BRT systems come in many forms including “busways” with dedicated rights-of-way, service that utilizes HOV lanes, and “express” or limited stop vehicles on pre-existing routes. BRT systems with high levels of service, however, have many of the following characteristics:

- **Bus only exclusive right-of-way:** dedicated bus lanes separated from all other traffic modes.
- **Comprehensive coverage:** BRTs can also take advantage of existing roadways in cities that already have a comprehensive road network for private automobiles. In these cases, busses have priority over automobiles at traffic signals.
- **High-frequency all day service serving a diverse market:** serving all income ranges by moving people from their current location to their destination with high frequency and reliability while maintaining a high level of customer experience.
- **BRT Preferential Treatment:** the preferential treatment of BRT vehicles at intersections with the extension of green time at a traffic signal or activation of the green light by an approaching bus.
- **Articulated Busses:** segmented vehicles achieving a longer vehicle length, the ability to transport more passengers per vehicle, and, thus, lower costs per rider.
- **Fare collection off vehicle:** A fare collection system at the station that does not involve the driver. This allows the boarding process to proceed faster, reducing the time for the trip.
- **Level boarding:** BRT systems may use low floor busses (or high level platforms with high floor busses) to speed up passenger boarding and enhance accessibility.
- **High Quality Stations:** BRT systems often feature significant investment in weather protected stations that may incorporate attractive amenities, potentially including “real time” information of approaching transit vehicles.



**Transit-oriented Development (TOD)** is a mixed-use, pedestrian friendly, commercial and residential area that maximizes its proximity and access to public transportation. A TOD neighborhood typically is centered on a public transit stop or station, which is surrounded by relatively high-density development, including retail, with progressively lower-density development spreading outward from the center. It has become an accepted standard that TODs are most effectively located within a radius of approximately one-quarter mile from a transit stop. This distance can be extended to a degree in an active and vibrant pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use setting.

- Transit-oriented development occurs in many forms and is not related to any specific architectural style. There are, however, attributes that many TOD developments share:
- Mixed-use development: This frequently involves commercial ground floor uses that encourage pedestrian traffic and upper level uses, such as office and residential that promotes density and around the clock occupancy.
- Modified grid network: including both streets and pedestrian sidewalks, these networks typically have a unifying landscape and streetscape treatment. An interconnected system of streets approaching a grid encourages a more active pedestrian flow.
- Multi-modal environment: the ability to address a wide range of transportation modes including transit, the automobile (including parking), bicycles, pedestrians, and other alternative modes.
- Design harmony: although a single style of architecture may not be mandated, there should be a continuity of form that includes building scale, materials, massing, and other design features.



- Public assets and features: the form and function of a TOD can be enhanced by public and institutional assets, such as monuments and markers, public parks and squares, and public or private institutions (like schools or churches).

Many cities in the United States and Canada have developed TOD policies. They may include comprehensive and strategic plans, design guidelines, zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations. Portland, Denver, and San Francisco, for example, have developed plans and policies to reduce reliance on the automobile and increase the use of public transit.



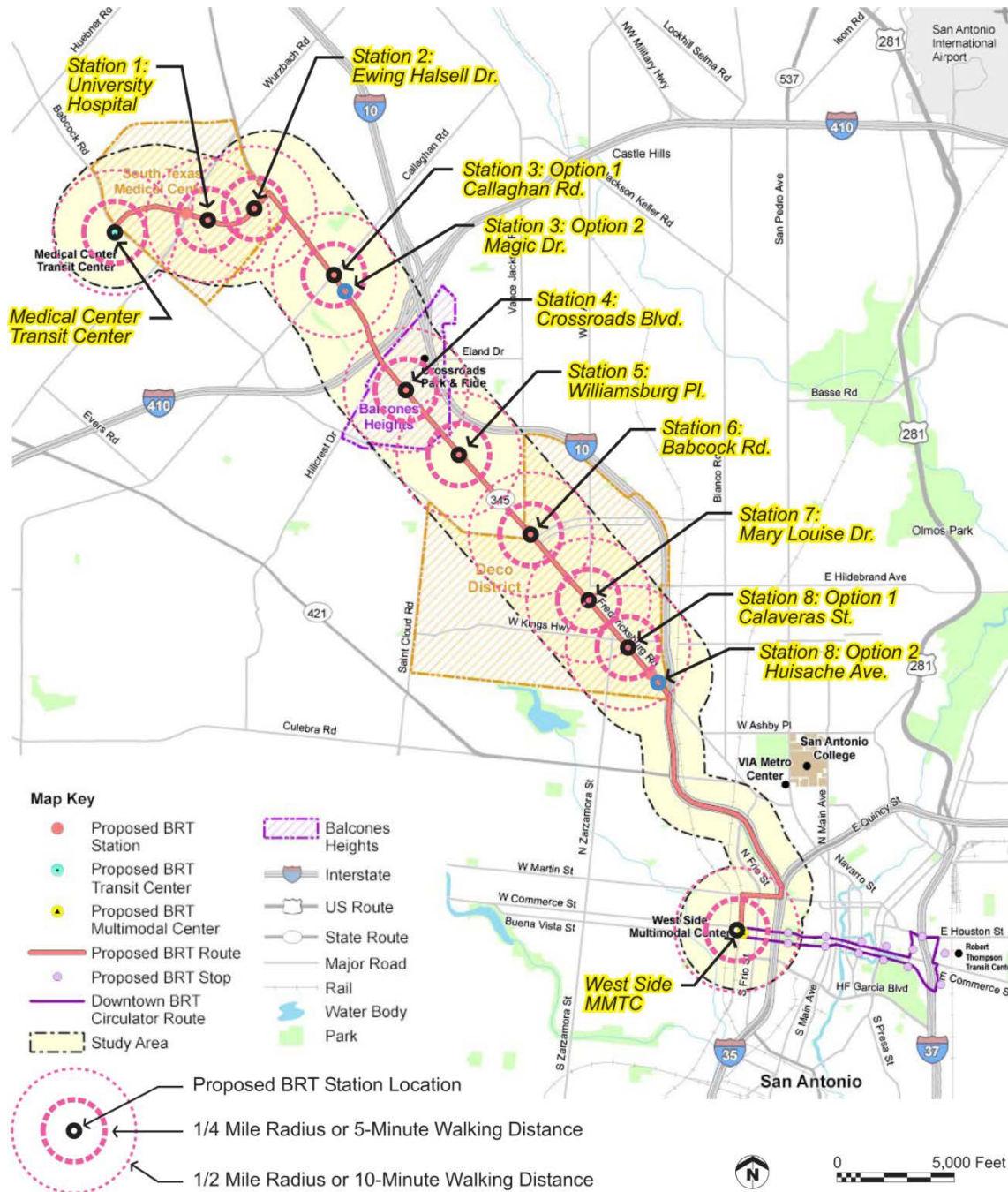
### **The Proposed VIA Bus Rapid Transit System**

San Antonio's regional transit agency, VIA, has proposed the development of a BRT system serving the entire metropolitan area. After an extensive study that considered population and employment density, the potential for transit ridership, and a number of other factors, it was determined that the best location for the system's pilot project was along the Fredericksburg Road corridor linking the Southwest Texas Medical Center with downtown San Antonio.

# Master Plan

## City of Balcones Heights

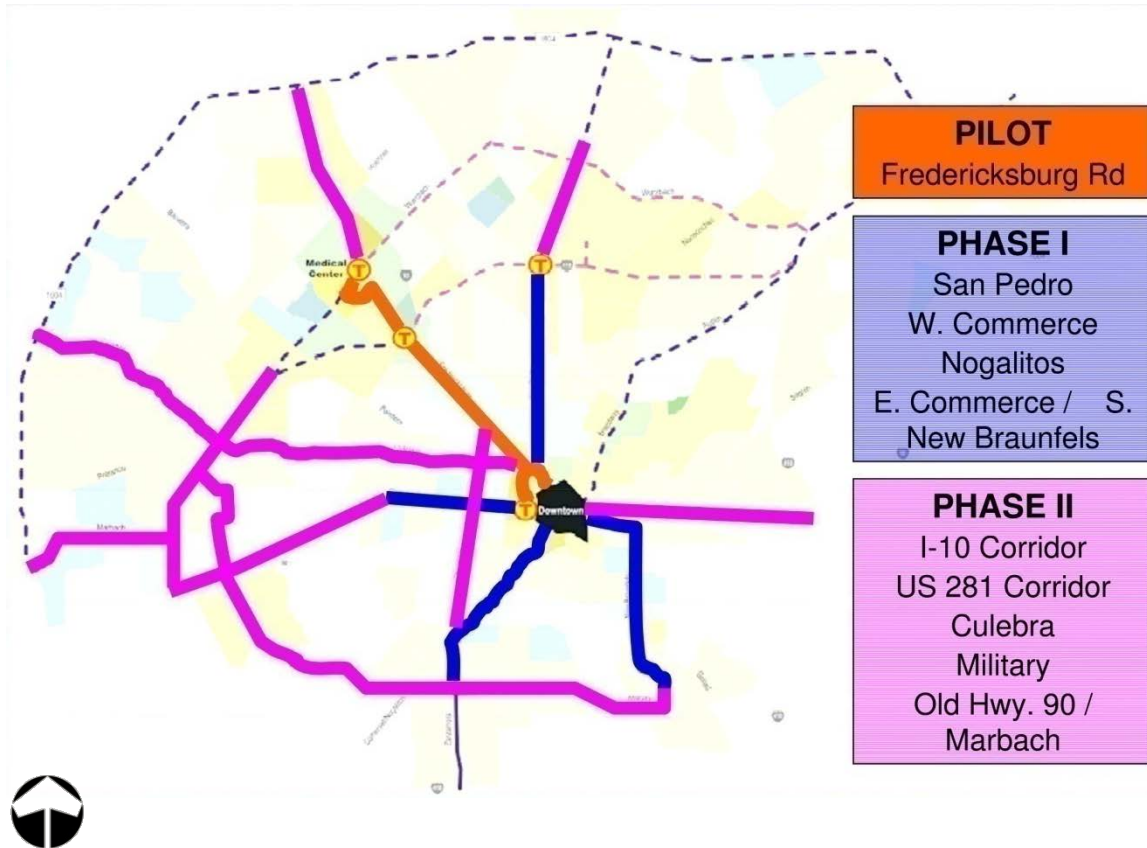
This pilot project is anticipated to be operational in 2012. When completed, it will create location advantages for Balcones Heights, which will be strategically positioned along a transit line serving major employment centers and concentrated neighborhoods in the San Antonio region.



Proposed BRT Station Locations of Fredericksburg Road Pilot Project



Furthermore, the Fredericksburg Road pilot project is planned to become the first project of a multi-phased regional BRT program encompassing three phases.



*Multiple Phases of Regional BRT Program*

Together, these phases will provide a high level of rapid transit service to the entire region: linking places of employment to residential areas; linking neighborhoods to recreation, shopping, and entertainment; and linking everyone to health care, education, and other significant institutions.

### The Characteristics of BRT on Fredericksburg Road

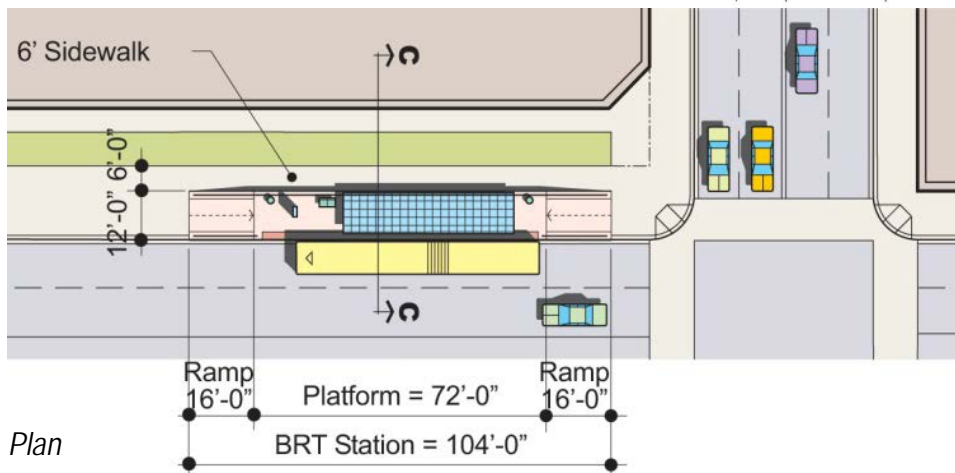
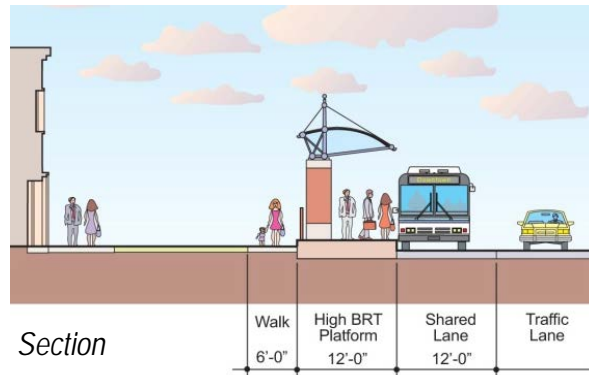
The Bus Rapid Transit on Fredericksburg Road will be a “trunk line” in a comprehensive regional transit program. The BRT route will be supplemented by a series of local feeder bus routes. For improved speed of service, the number of stations along the BRT corridor will be limited; the local bus system will continue to operate along Fredericksburg Road.

### Right-of-Way Considerations

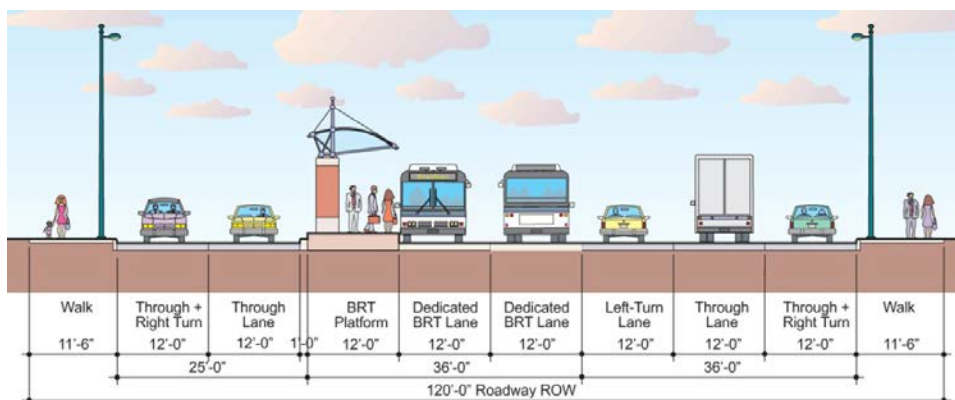
Fredericksburg Road has a relatively wide right-of-way. That provides opportunities to explore different configurations for Bus Rapid Transit that are not available in other locations along the corridor. For example, in San Antonio's Deco District, due to its relatively narrow right-of-way, BRT vehicles will operate comingled with automotive traffic.

There are two possible configurations for BRT along Fredericksburg Road:

- Curb Running**, in which BRT vehicles run along the curb lanes on each side of the street with automotive traffic running in the center of the street.

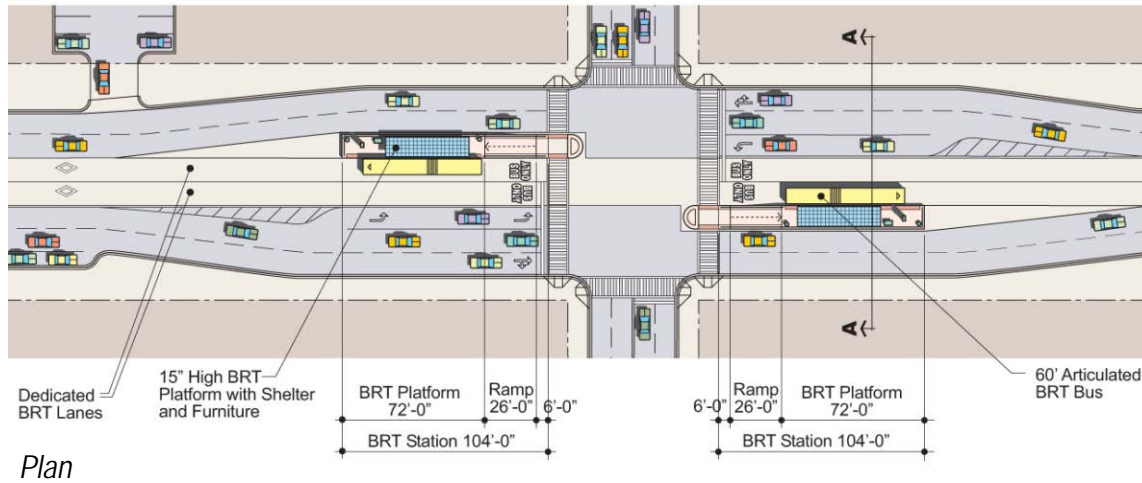


- Center Running**, in which the BRT vehicles occupy a median down the center of Fredericksburg Road with automotive traffic running on either side.



Section





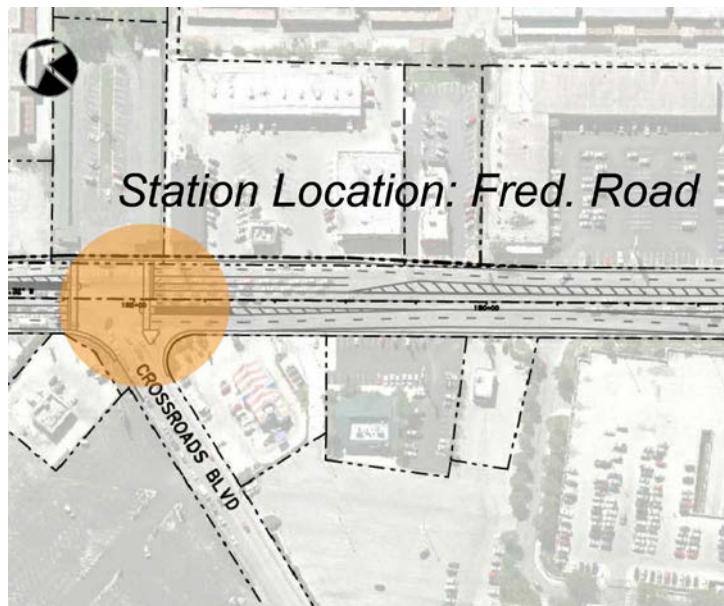
Both of these alternatives have advantages and disadvantages. The Center Running configuration allows easier access for automobiles onto adjacent development, as well as more easily accommodating on street parking, if applicable. Left turns, however, can only be made at key intersection points. The Curb Running configuration allows for better access from the BRT vehicle to the sidewalk, however, parking and access to adjacent development is more difficult because they must cross the active BRT lanes.

At this point, VIA has indicated that Center Running is the most probable configuration for Fredericksburg Road in Balcones Heights. Therefore, it is the one documented in this report. If the Curb Running configuration is ultimately selected, it will influence the recommendations for streetscape and on-street parking, but it will not significantly impact the nature of property development recommendations.

### Proposed BRT Station Location

It is anticipated that Balcones Heights will have one BRT Station, since stations for any rapid transit line are more widely spaced than local busses. The logical location is near the intersection of Crossroads Boulevard. This will allow high quality service to the Crossroads Mall area, as well as development along Fredericksburg Road and the higher density housing along Gentleman Road. In current plans, VIA has shown a BRT transit station straddling the intersection of Fredericksburg Road and Crossroads Boulevard.

It is essential that the redevelopment of Balcones Heights be undertaken with a comprehensive understanding of the nature of transit-oriented development. VIA, TxDOT, the City, and individual businesses and citizens must all work in unison to achieve the new vision for Balcones Heights. It is not just a transit program or a roadway program or a redevelopment program. It is all of these programs, combined into a single plan of action, where the sum is far more valuable than the individual parts.



*Station Location in Balcones Heights*

#### ***Highlights of Bus Rapid Transit in Balcones Heights***

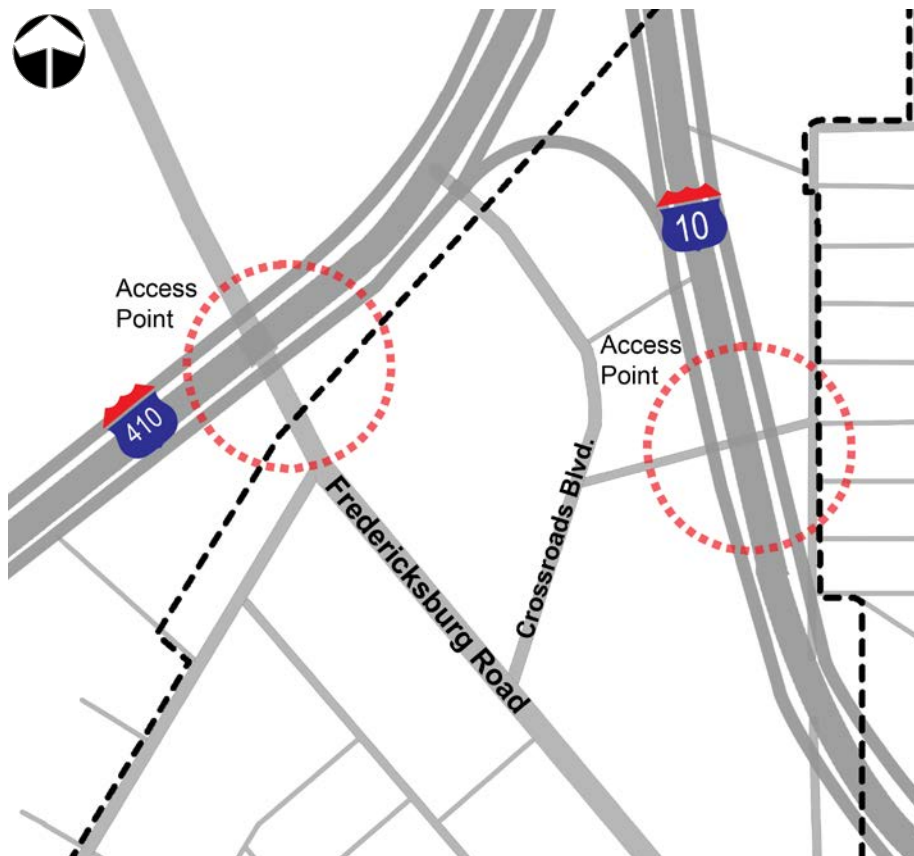
- ***BRT anticipated operations to begin in 2012***
- ***BRT in an exclusive right-of-way along Fredericksburg Road in Balcones Heights***
- ***Preliminary plans show BRT transit operating in the center of the street, although curb running transit is also possible***
- ***Left hand turns and emergency vehicle access will be accommodated at key intersections***
- ***Parking access and curb cuts will be addressed in the roadway planning process***
- ***One BRT station will be located in Balcones Heights, most likely near Crossroads Boulevard***
- ***Local bus service will continue in Balcones Heights***

**Note: Plan graphics on BRT were provided by VIA.**

## 1.4 Roadway Access to Balcones Heights

Balcones Heights is well served by a network of roadways, ranging from freeways to surface streets. Two significant highways, Interstate-10 and the Interstate-410 Loop, intersect at Balcones Heights, with a direct interchange access to Fredericksburg Road. This intersection was a major impetus in building what is now the Crossroads Mall in 1961. Traffic counts taken in 2007 showed over 165,000 vehicles per day on Interstate-410 and 153,000 vehicles per day on Interstate-10 at Balcones Heights.

Fredericksburg Road (Spur 345) is a four-lane primary north-south arterial that connects points north to downtown San Antonio. Prior to the development of the interstate highway system, Fredericksburg Road was the primary highway in the area. 2007 traffic counts showed an average daily traffic volume of 46,000 vehicles on Fredericksburg Road at the Crossroads Mall. West of Fredericksburg Road, neighborhoods are served by a grid network of streets. The eastern side of the City consists of a limited number of streets in a more “superblock” configuration. Interstate 10 separates the City on its eastern side. East of the highway, a church and school occupy relatively large blocks, as compared to the adjacent San Antonio neighborhood street network grid.



*Key Roadway Access Points into Balcones Heights*

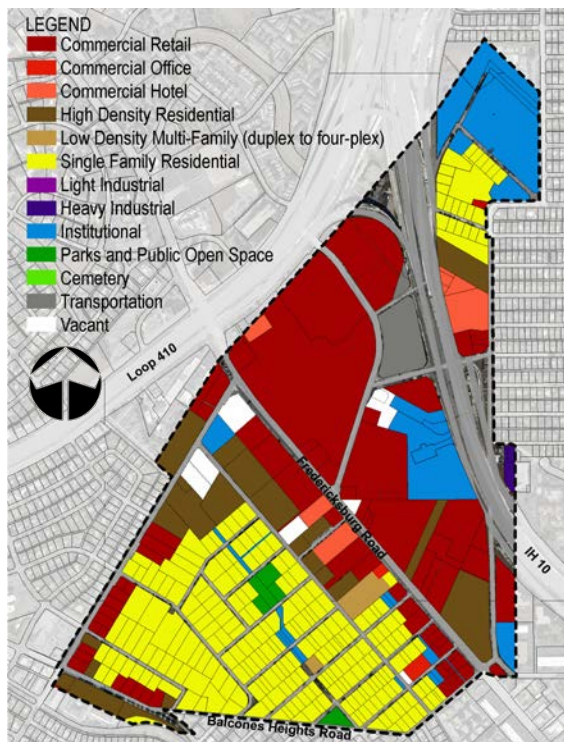
## 1.5 Property Characteristics in Balcones Heights

Property in Balcones Heights has characteristics that are important to understand when considering development or redevelopment. The following descriptions characterize property in four categories: Existing Land Use; Existing Zoning; Property Ownership; and Existing Buildings and Site Conditions. The Existing Zoning Map was derived from City sources. All other maps were formulated through on-site evaluations.

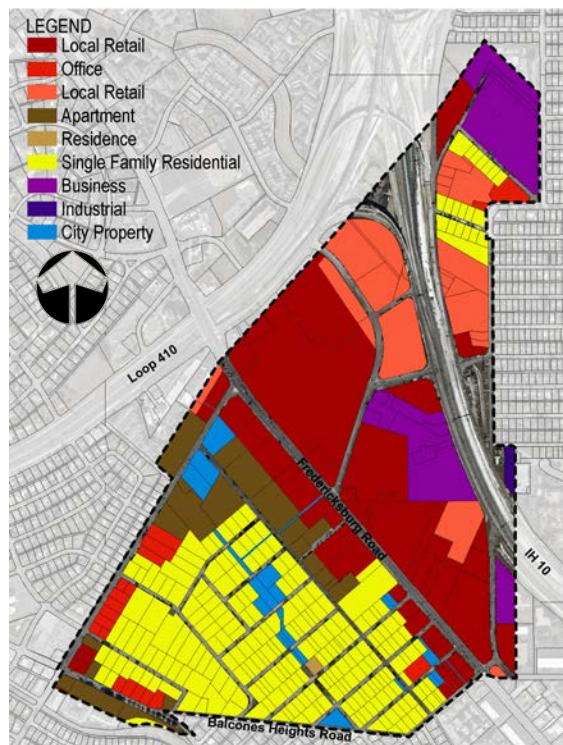
### Existing Land Use

There are two distinct characteristics for the land use pattern of Balcones Heights that are related to the era of development that influenced them.

The first era is the pre-interstate highway period of the late 1940s and early 1950s. At that time, residential suburbs were still frequently developed within a strong grid system of streets. The single-family residential neighborhoods to the western side of Fredericksburg Road were developed in this pattern, albeit with relatively large lots for their time. The development along Fredericksburg Road also exhibited the pre-freeway influences, with set-back commercial properties aligning both sides of this arterial street. The institutional and residential uses to the eastern side of Interstate-10 also represent this smaller site pattern.



*Existing Land Use*



*Existing Zoning*



## **Existing Zoning**

A zoning ordinance is the legal mechanism through which a city or other governmental entities regulate the use of land. The term “zoning” has its origins from the practice of separating a group of land uses with similar or compatible characteristics from a group of non-compatible uses by designating zones of allowed uses. In addition to regulating the use of land, most zoning ordinances also regulate building heights, lot coverage, parking requirements, and other physical development characteristics.

The primary purpose of zoning has been to segregate uses that are thought to be incompatible. In practice, zoning is often used to prevent new development from interfering with existing residents or businesses and to preserve the "character" of a community. There should be a high degree of correlation between a city's zoning and its actual land use. This is certainly the case in Balcones Heights, as there are very few inconsistencies between the zoning and land use maps. For the most part, these differences can be explained by the nature of Balcones Heights' ordinance. Therefore, the administration of Balcones Heights' zoning appears to be quite consistent.

The City utilizes a “Euclidean” style ordinance. This name is borrowed from the City of Euclid, Ohio's ordinance that was the subject of a famous U.S. Supreme Court case in 1926 that affirmed the right of a governmental entity to use zoning to protect the public's health, safety, and welfare. This style of ordinance frequently allows some lesser intense uses, such as medium density residential, to occur in more intense categories, such as commercial. It is also known as a “step down” ordinance.

On the other hand, the Balcones Heights' current ordinance is not well suited for the mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development it desires. The current ordinance requires large building setbacks and allows parking in the front of commercial buildings. This discourages pedestrian activity. The ordinance does not directly encourage mixed-use development, although it would be possible for an innovative developer to argue for a mixed-use project by using the “step down” provisions.

Finally, Balcones Heights' zoning ordinance is in need of significant updates and rewriting. Several categories listed in the ordinance are not described within the text. The office zoning category is significantly under-described in the text, and there are not enough explanations of desirable building forms that would encourage and regulate the City's development intent.

## **Property Ownership**

Major property holdings can be important in their influence on future development in Balcones Heights. In some cases, major land holding may be easier to acquire for development because there are fewer property owners with which to negotiate. On the other hand, negotiations with multiple owners are frequently cumbersome, and a single owner can inhibit the ability to assemble the land required for a significant development.

The Significant Property Owners map indicates commercial or multi-family residential tracts of two or more contiguous properties. This information was compiled from an evaluation of Bexar County property ownership tables.

The largest single property ownership tract is the Crossroads Mall. At one time, this tract was larger, but parcels have been sold to other developments, such as Target and Dave & Busters. Not indicated on the map are land leases, such as the Crossroads Mall land leases to accommodate SpringHill Suites by Marriott. Similar agreements with Stein Mart, Hobby Lobby, Burlington Coat Factory, and others could reduce the available parcel size and development flexibility of the Crossroads Mall.

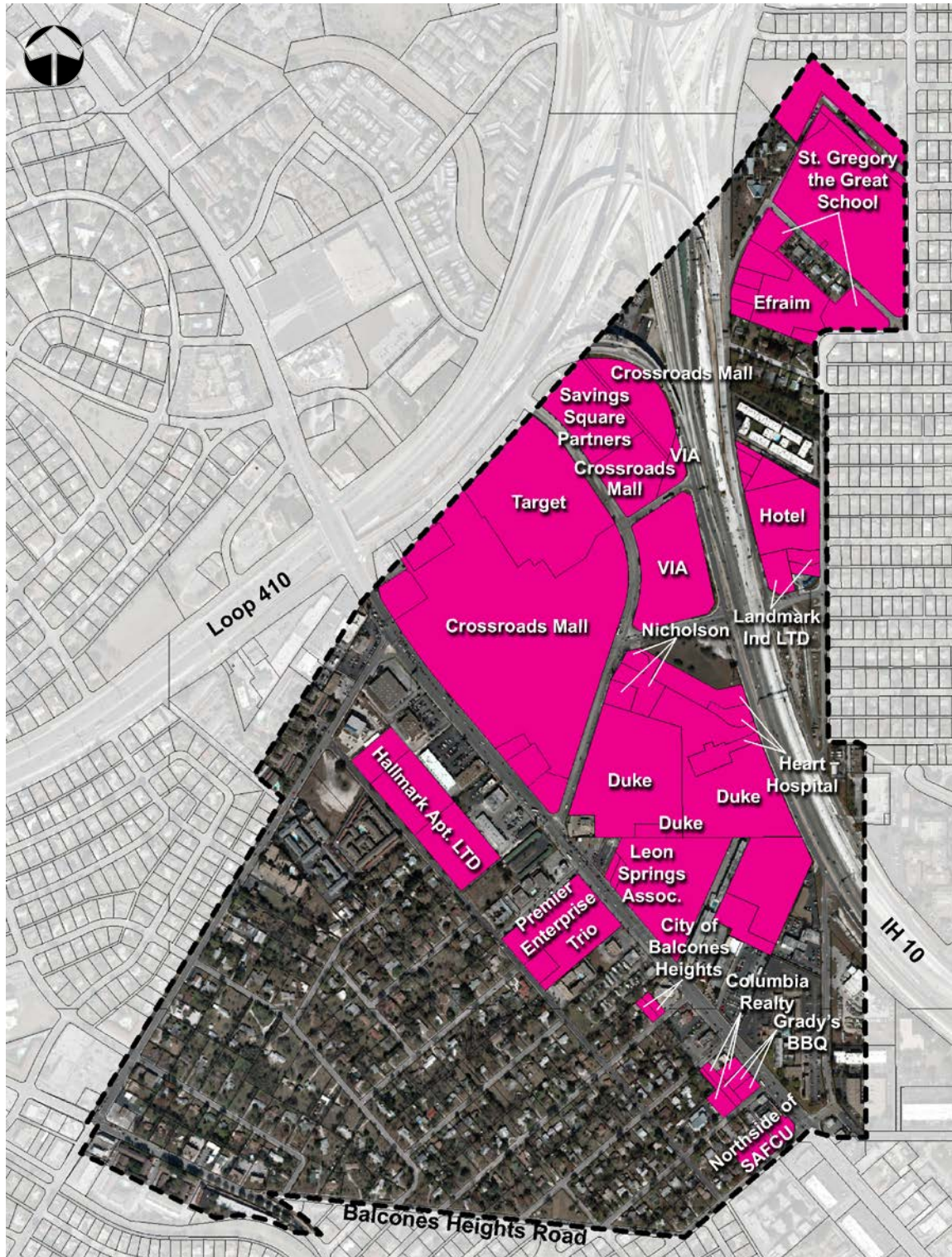
Adjacent to the proposed BRT location at Crossroads Boulevard is the Duke property, which contains Gold's Gym and other smaller businesses, but the building configuration, in relation to redevelopment, is inefficient primarily because of an oversized parking lot. The Leon Springs Association owns the Circle Center, which is similarly underutilized. Both properties present opportunities for complete redevelopment.

VIA currently owns the property occupied by their bus transfer station and park and ride facility that is adjacent to Interstate-10. There has been some discussion in Balcones Heights with regard to relocating this facility closer to Fredericksburg Road to better support the Crossroads Mall redevelopment and transit-oriented development. For this to occur, the existing ownership questions would need to be considered.

Significant medium to high density residential tracts along Gentleman Road are held by only three property owners. This may prove important if transit-oriented higher density residential development is sought in the future.

# Master Plan

## City of Balcones Heights



Significant Property Owners

The Existing Building and Site Conditions Map was created through field observation taken from the street. Buildings were not evaluated internally for their structural integrity or code compliance. In this analysis, residential housing was not evaluated. Primary or significant buildings on a site were the primary consideration, however, secondary buildings were considered in the evaluation if they deviated significantly from the primary building.

Visual observations were made regarding the buildings' basic integrity, such as obvious structural defects or failures. These might consist of leaning buildings, breaks in the wall or skin of the buildings, failing canopies, or deformed roofs. "Cosmetic" characteristics were also considered. These factors included chipping paint, torn fabric awnings, broken signage, and other non-structural indicators of disrepair.

Through the evaluation, four categories were created:

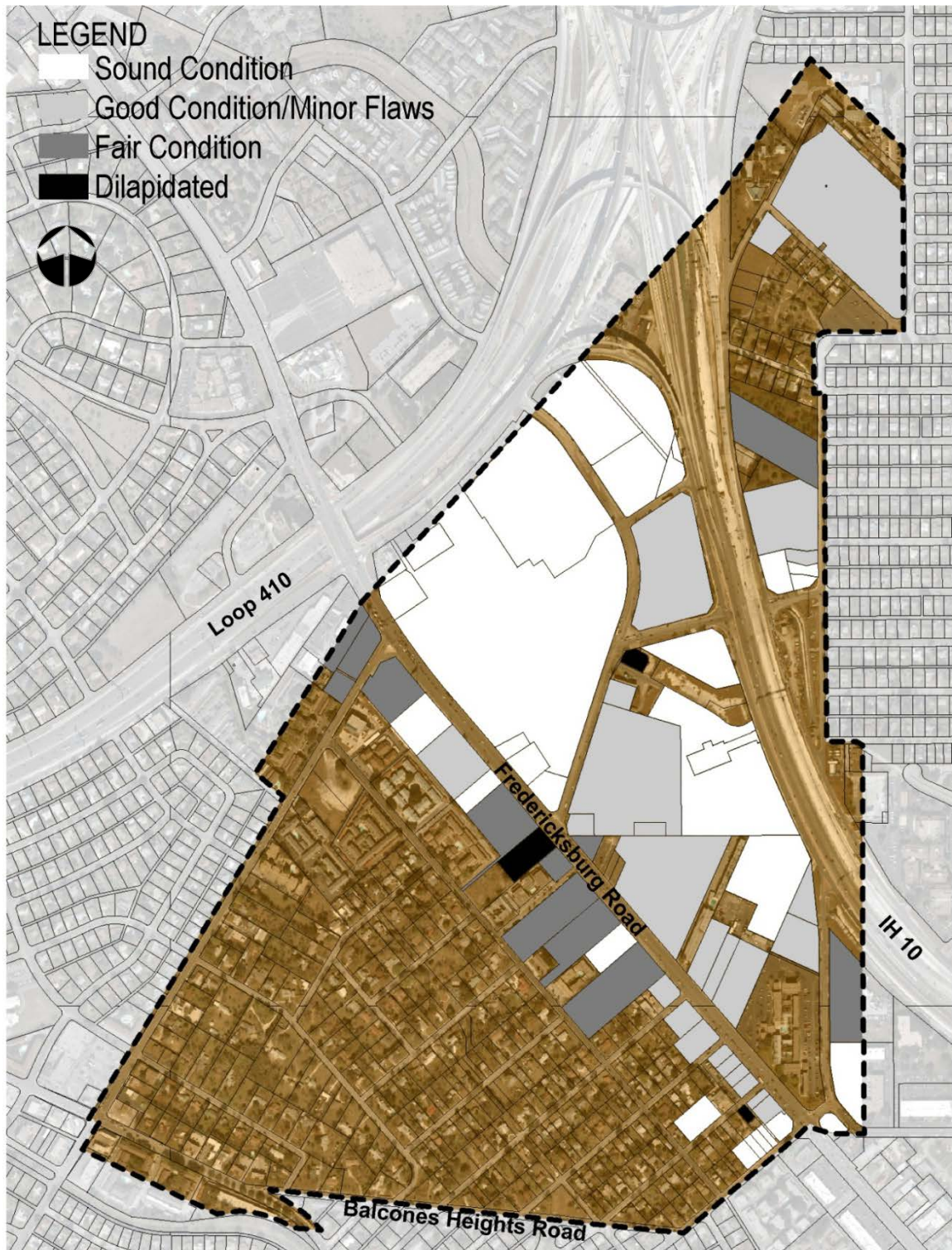
|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>Sound Condition</b>       | <b><i>Exhibiting no significant structural or cosmetic defects</i></b>                   |
| <b>Good Condition</b>        | <b><i>Only minor "cosmetic" issues or flaws</i></b>                                      |
| <b>Fair Condition</b>        | <b><i>Obvious structural or numerous cosmetic issues; significant repairs needed</i></b> |
| <b>Dilapidated Condition</b> | <b><i>Significant structural issues</i></b>  |

The majority of buildings surveyed are in "sound condition" or "good condition." The highest concentration of "sound" and "good" buildings are located between Fredericksburg Road and Interstate-10. This area is characterized by the Crossroads Mall and its associated commercial development, such as Target, Dave & Busters, and the SpringHill Suites by Marriott. Institutional buildings like the TexSan Heart Hospital also fall into this category.

To the west side of Fredericksburg Road, a number of buildings exist in a commercial strip configuration. Some were even constructed prior to the development of the interstate highway system. The general condition of these buildings falls into the "good condition" to "fair condition" needed categories. Several properties, however, are in "sound condition."

To the east of Interstate-10, most properties were evaluated as "good condition" to "fair condition." There are very few non-residential buildings in the city that are in a "dilapidated condition."





*Existing Buildings and Site Conditions*

## **Chapter 2. The Balcones Heights Master Plan**

In 2008, the City of Balcones Heights engaged in a public process to develop a planning concept for the City's future. The report that was a result of that effort was titled **"Balcones Heights ...forging a new urban frontier."** In this report, adopted by the Balcones Heights City Council on September 8, 2008, a bold new pattern for development and redevelopment was established.

Recommendations concentrated on seven zones, each with a distinct development program. For the purposes of this master plan, so as not to be confused with the City's zoning ordinance, the initiatives will be referred to as recommendations. Several of the geographic areas that are the subject of master plan recommendations are expanded upon in subsequent sections of this report.

### **2.1 Recommendation 1. *Initiate Bus Rapid Transit and Fredericksburg Road Improvements***

The development of VIA's Bus Rapid Transit system will improve the aesthetics and function of Fredericksburg Road for both transit and vehicular travel. Currently, BRT plans for Balcones Heights indicate that two dedicated transit lanes will be provided in the center of the Fredericksburg Road, and four vehicular travel lanes will also be accommodated. Most of these improvements will take place within the current Fredericksburg Road right-of-way. In some instances, additional right-of-way will need to be acquired. Recommendations include:

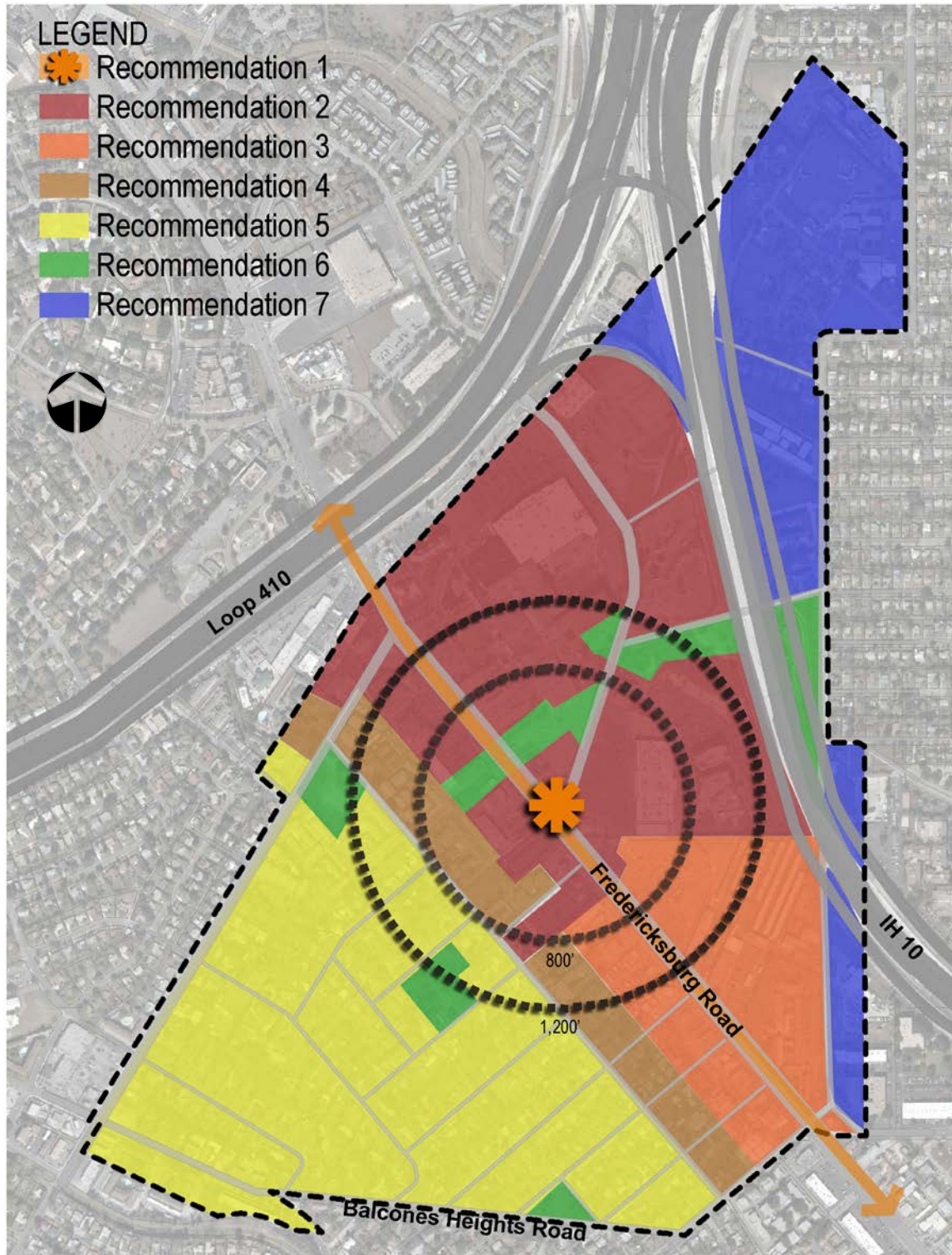
- **The redevelopment of Fredericksburg Road for automobiles and BRT.**  
Preferred TxDOT and VIA plans include the "re-crowning" of Fredericksburg Road and the placement of the BRT lanes in the center of the right-of-way. The intent is to visually define BRT lanes with only painted lane markings. In this concept, a physical barrier would also be placed in the center of the roadway to prevent non-transit vehicles from turning across the BRT lanes. If the roadway is reconstructed to TxDOT standards, each vehicle lane would be 12 feet wide. It is important, however, to redevelop the roadway in a manner that promotes a more pedestrian-oriented and "human" scale of development. TxDOT has indicated that the lane width could be narrowed, perhaps as little as 10 feet per lane, as long as they do not have long-term control and maintenance of the roadway. Narrower lanes would also tend to slow the speed of traffic, making the environment safer for pedestrians and drivers.

An alternative configuration is also being considered. It would involve locating BRT along the curb lanes on either side of Fredericksburg Road. Traffic lanes and left turn lanes would be located in the center of the roadway. Parking lanes may occur between the bus lanes and sidewalk, but automobiles would have to



# Master Plan

City of Balcones Heights



Master Plan Recommendations

cross the transit lanes if this configuration occurs, creating a potentially dangerous transit/auto conflict.

If plans for BRT are not realized, it is still important to undertake a redevelopment of right-of-way along Fredericksburg Road. Ample traffic lanes, turning lanes, and streetscape should be pursued by the City. Funding sources for these improvements will need to be aggressively pursued if BRT is not developed, as funding for roadway improvements and BRT are currently linked.

- **Parallel parking along the curb on each side of Fredericksburg Road** is currently proposed by VIA and TxDOT. This is advantageous for redevelopment along the roadway. Visible parking provides the perception of abundant parking, which is vital in the psychology of successful retail development. Parallel parking along a busy roadway also provides a safer and better defined sidewalk environment for pedestrians.
- **A pedestrian sidewalk along Fredericksburg Road.** A 7 foot wide sidewalk is currently proposed by VIA and TxDOT directly adjacent to the curb on both sides of Fredericksburg Road. Sidewalks are essential to maintain accessibility for people with disabilities as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In areas of intense pedestrian activity, it will be necessary to widen the sidewalks to accommodate pedestrian volumes.
- **A BRT station at Crossroads Boulevard.** Currently, the BRT station in Balcones Heights is proposed to straddle the intersection of Fredericksburg Road and Crossroads Boulevard.
- **Provisions for local busses and bus stops.** BRT is a regional rapid transit mode. As such, it stops far less frequently than local busses. This allows BRT to reduce the time of a transit trip. Therefore, some BRT passengers must transfer to the local bus system in order to complete their trip. It is important to provide suitable pedestrian amenities, including safe crosswalks, at the point of transfer from BRT to local busses.
- **Turning movements for vehicles.** With the BRT lanes in the center of the roadway, left turns into the development fronting Fredericksburg Road will occur only at key intersections. It is recommended that U-turns also be allowed, so that businesses have adequate vehicular access.
- **Accommodations for emergency vehicles.** In some US cities, emergency vehicles are allowed to utilize the rapid transit lanes. As a matter of public safety, this would be desirable in Balcones Heights.

- **Curb cut management and minimization.** Portions of Fredericksburg Road currently have no curbs; rather they have “head-in” parking along the entire length of a retail property. This practice will not be allowed to occur in the redevelopment of Fredericksburg Road. The right-of-way is not wide enough to accommodate this current parking pattern, and backing onto a busy roadway is a safety hazard. In the redevelopment of the roadway, the distance between curb cuts will be regulated and entrance “throat widths” into parking areas will be minimized. In some circumstances, this will require adjacent businesses to cooperate with each other by providing cross-site parking access.

## **2.2 Recommendation 2. *Development of the Crossroads District***

Nationally, it has been demonstrated that transit, accompanied by appropriate development strategies, policies, and sound market forces, can yield significant commercial, residential, recreational, entertainment and tourism development opportunities. The district around the Crossroads Boulevard intersection represents a good opportunity to promote transit-oriented development.

The Crossroads District has the potential to be transformed through the following components:

- **A transit-oriented development zone within approximately 1200 feet of the BRT transit station.** This is the area that is within walking distance of the proposed BRT transit stop. This is a commonly accepted standard for transit-oriented development.
- **Providing higher density, mixed-use development.** This may be accomplished by enhancing the strengths of existing retail, entertainment, tourism, and conference anchors, as well as by adding residential, institutional, and office uses. Additional structured parking decks should also be explored.
- **Integration of a “modified grid” system of streets on larger sites in the district** to yield a more pedestrian-oriented commercial area. To create the desired environment, significant changes in the pedestrian pattern must be undertaken. It is preferable for the current surface parking lots to become the setting for a new system of streets and mixed-use buildings.



- **Development of urban parks, plazas, and squares that connect with a community-wide and regional trail system.** Some elements of this system currently exist within the mall property, such as the water feature and amphitheater near the movie theaters. This has become the setting for a very popular summer regional jazz concert series. These elements should be maintained and expanded to create attractive and active public amenities that help draw visitors and create assets for an emerging urban neighborhood.

### **2.3 Recommendation 3. *Development and Redevelopment of the Fredericksburg Road Corridor***

Along Fredericksburg Road, outside of the approximate 1200 foot radius primary and secondary development zone, opportunities exist for both redevelopment and new development. In some cases, existing property and business owners will want to transform their properties, based on the increased land value, new business prospects, and adjacent “higher-use” redevelopment initiatives. Transformation along the corridor should consist of the following initiatives:

- **Redevelopment of parking as a shared initiative, rather than as site-by-site responsibility.** Relocating parking from the front to the rear of buildings will effect a better pedestrian environment along the roadway and sidewalk edge. It is also important to develop parking cross-connections among adjacent properties to benefit the movement of vehicles and pedestrians.
- **Reorientation of storefronts from automobile dominant to pedestrian and/or transit accessible.** This will be accomplished by locating storefronts closer to sidewalks, along with appropriate landscape and streetscape treatments, and by moving parking away from the front of buildings.
- **Promotion of new, mixed-use development with commercial ground floor uses and office or residential upper floor uses.** The improvements to Fredericksburg Road represent significant investments in public infrastructure. This investment increases





accessibility to more people and customers, creates a more visually attractive corridor, and enhances the economic development potential of the corridor. Therefore, more intense development and redevelopment may take place. It is important, however, that the form of that development support the infrastructure initiatives in pedestrian and/or transit amenities. This may be accomplished through a combination of uses in a higher density and a more compact development configuration.

#### **2.4 Recommendation 4. *Development and Redevelopment of the Higher Density Residential Zone along Gentleman Road***

Along Gentleman Road, a relatively higher density of residential development currently exists, primarily apartment complexes that cater to lower and lower-middle income populations. A significant portion of this area is within the 1200 foot transit-development zone. This area can be transformed over time by:

- **Redevelopment of higher density residential uses**, either by renovating existing structures or through medium to higher density residential redevelopment opportunities. These developments should target populations with a fuller range of incomes.
- **Improvement of the streetscape and landscape environment** that supports and attracts economic development, as well as enhances the visual and market appeal of the area.



#### **2.5 Recommendation 5. *Redevelopment and/or Conservation of the Single-Family Residential Zone***

The western side of Balcones Heights consists primarily of single-family housing in varying states of repair. It is mostly beyond the 1200 foot transit development zone, but it should garner benefits from general redevelopment and economic investment within Balcones Heights. This area should remain as a single-family neighborhood, but policies should be modified to support contemporary living practices. As residential redevelopment pressures increase in this area, it will also be important to encourage current residents to renovate or expand their homes, as well as keep them from falling victim to escalating home values and additional taxation. Strategies should include:

- **Working with, and providing incentives for, existing residents to conserve and upgrade their residences.** This could include home renovation education,

packaging home improvement loans from area banks, and improving neighborhood infrastructure and aesthetics.

- **Promoting the sensitive integration of new residential development into the neighborhood.** Frequently, areas with increasing land values have properties that are subject to housing “tear downs” and the construction of new housing that is out of scale with the existing neighborhood. This issue can be addressed by encouraging compatibility in the development of new housing, even if it is developed at a larger scale.
- **Addressing the ill effects of potential tax increases resulting from redevelopment improvements in the community.** As property values increase, so do property taxes. This becomes a problem when current residents are on fixed or limited incomes, and they can no longer afford to remain in their homes. Policies should be formulated to address this issue, so that citizens of Balcones Heights can reap the rewards of their investment in their homes, while not be driven from the community.

## **2.6 Recommendation 6. *Creation of a Comprehensive Parks and Trails System***

A parks and trails system builds economic value in a community, enhances aesthetic value, and provides for greater mobility. In Balcones Heights, a new parks and trails system should link with regional trails and assets, as well as accommodate alternative transportation modes. A comprehensive parks and trails system should accomplish the following:

- **Creating a regionally linked, community-wide trail system for pedestrians and bicycles.** The system should explore current natural and built assets, such as natural drainage channels, existing parks, school playfields, and parking lots (for trailheads). To the extent possible, the Balcones Heights system should link to trails in the City of San Antonio.
- **Creating a network of parks of various scales in commercial and residential zones.** Well designed municipal park systems have a variety of parks, many with different sizes and purposes. For example, a neighborhood park should cater to children and adult residents in the area, while a park or plaza in an urban, mixed-use center may cater to public activities and festivals in addition to urban neighborhood functions.
- **Developing a trail theme, as well as a signage and “wayfinding” system, that is compatible with the city’s comprehensive signage system.** A trail



system should portray the image of the community that it serves. Signage, landscaping, and paving systems, along with other factors, can create a theme that is unique to the City. Also, a signage and “wayfinding” system, as well as interpretive elements, can orient users to the distinct experience of the Balcones Heights parks and trails system.

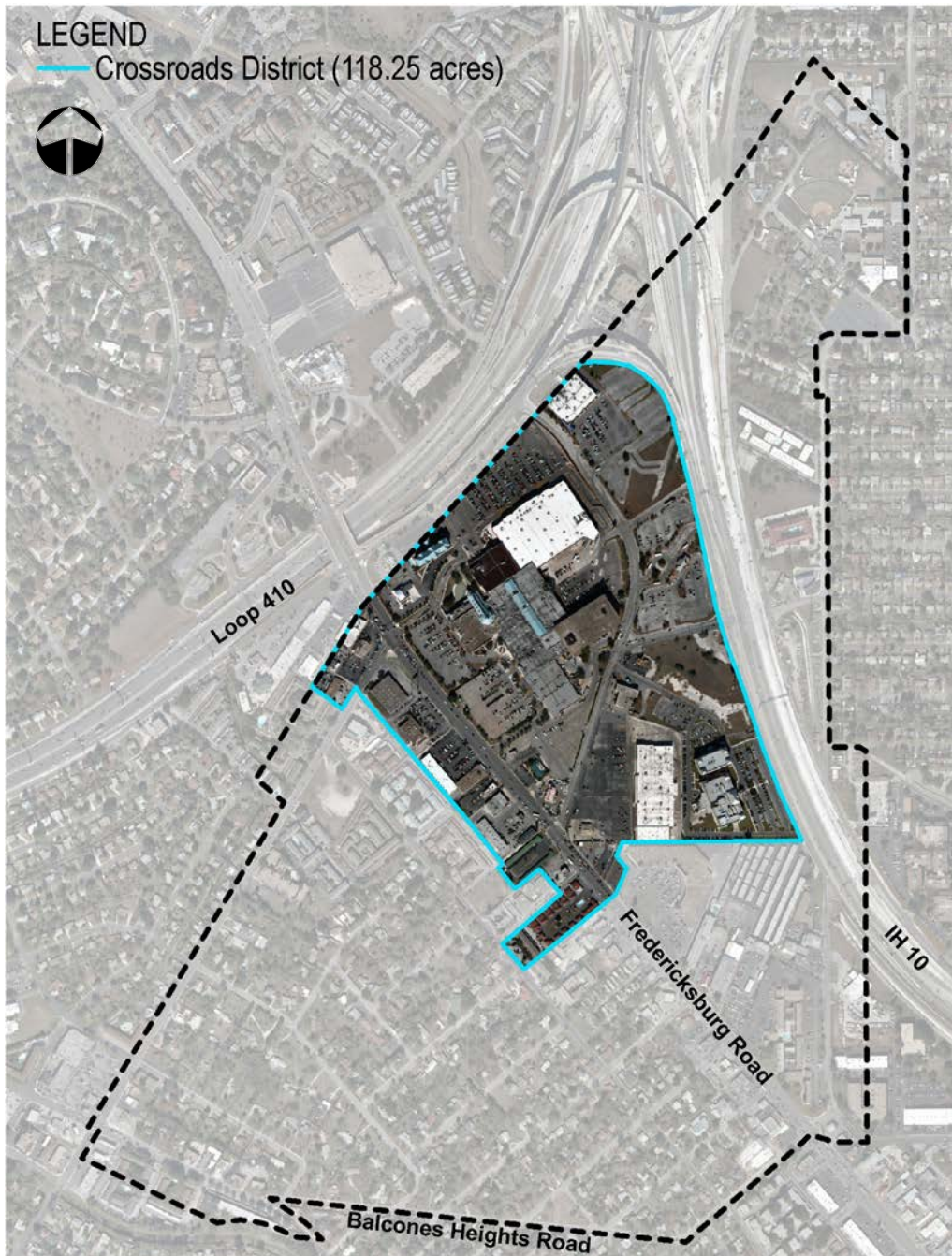
## **2.7 Recommendation 7. *Providing Linkages to East Balcones Heights***

A portion of Balcones Heights lies across I-10. Along with residential uses, the area is primarily an institutional site that is occupied by a church/school near a public school. It is important to secure strong linkages with these important community resources. Recommendations include:

- **Extending the trails system beneath I-10**, along with appropriate landscape, streetscape, and lighting, and addressing trail and roadway conflicts. It is difficult to place a trail under a highway viaduct. It is typically a dark, noisy, oppressive, and visually hostile environment. Many residents may also perceive this environment as unsafe. Therefore, great care must be taken when making this connection to overcome these liabilities through effective design.
- **Actively pursuing increased/continued communication with the residential/institutional components across I-10.** When Interstate-10 was constructed, it severed a portion of the City of Balcones Heights. By all appearances, this portion of the City relates more in scale and function to the neighboring City of San Antonio. It is important, therefore, to communicate with the residents, businesses, and institutions on the eastern side of I-10 and assure them of their value to their City.

## Chapter 3: The Crossroads District

The Crossroads District is bounded by I-410 to the north, I-10 to the east, the properties to the south of and fronting Crossroads Boulevard to the south, and mid-block between Fredericksburg Road and Gentleman Road to the south. This land area, including streets, represents 118.25 acres. It is also the most significant area in Balcones Heights in which to promote transit-oriented development. In this chapter, both transit and non-transit-oriented development scenarios are described.

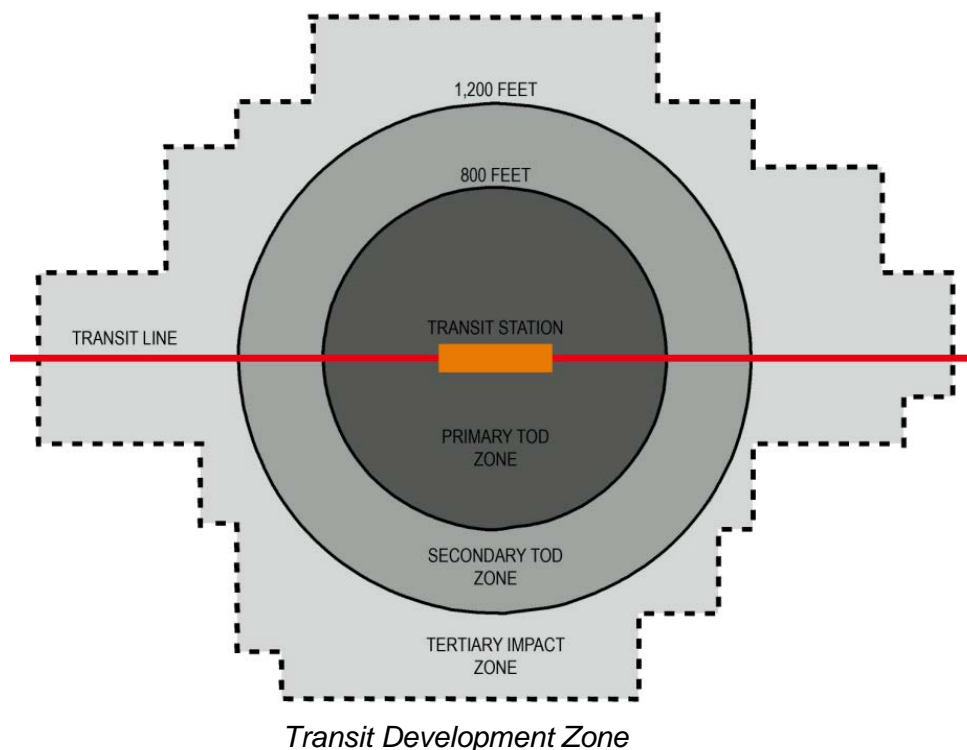


*Crossroads District Map*

### 3.1 Transit-oriented Development

VIA has indicated their intent to develop a BRT station at or near Crossroads Boulevard and Fredericksburg Road. They have concentrated their initial analysis at the intersection of these two streets, because of proximity to the existing VIA transfer station/park and ride location

It is an accepted standard that the primary transit-oriented development zone be within an 800 foot radius from the station location. This is the area in which the greatest pedestrian activity and potential development impact will exist. This zone can be extended to approximately 1200 feet from the station if a pedestrian-friendly environment, amenities, and activities exist. The potential development impact, however, generally decreases with distance from the station, although some tertiary development impact is possible beyond 1200 feet. That impact is largely dependent on pedestrian-oriented amenities and functions, as well as topographic considerations.



### Transit-oriented Development Principles

- *The primary development impact zone is within 800 feet of a station. Retail development potential is strongest in this primary zone. The best opportunities for TOD retail are the closest sites to the transit station.*
- *A secondary development impact zone is between 800 feet and approximately 1200 feet of a station.*
- *Fixed guideway, rapid transit systems (heavy rail, light rail, and BRT) have greater development impact because they are perceived as a more “permanent” infrastructure investment by the development community.*
- *The majority of transit-oriented development patrons will typically use automobiles, so auto access and parking are also essential. Parking requirements, however, may be reduced because of transit access or shared parking between daytime and nighttime uses.*
- *To succeed, transit-oriented development must possess the qualities of sound development: location, visibility, transportation access, site configuration, and economic viability. Transit access can support this, but it does not alone create these characteristics.*
- *Sound TOD is mixed-use: retail, offices, residential, entertainment, and, sometimes institutional uses.*
- *Parks, plazas, public “places,” and streetscape amenities are necessary for successful transit and pedestrian-oriented development*

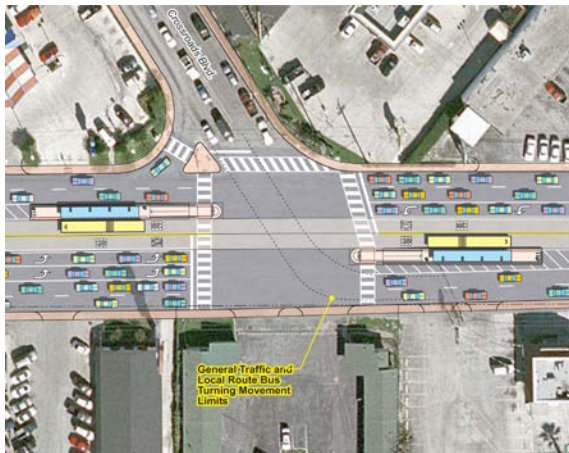




### **3.2 Transit-oriented Development with a BRT Station at the Crossroads Blvd. Intersection**

VIA has developed conceptual plans for a BRT Transfer Station at the intersection of Crossroads Boulevard and Fredericksburg Road. These initial plans, however, are subject to change as engineering plans progress. Indicated are two BRT lanes, three lane widths (southbound) for left turn lanes, one lane for the BRT station in each direction, four traffic lanes, and a northbound right turn lane from Fredericksburg Road onto Crossroads Boulevard.

Pedestrian crossings are indicated at the intersection. The BRT stations serve as an area of refuge for pedestrians in the center of the street. To accommodate both the oblique angle of the intersecting streets and a turning movement, a triangular island refuge exists on the east side of the intersection.



*Proposed Station Plan*



*Existing Intersection*



*Eye Level View*

The accompanying diagram illustrates the potential development, redevelopment, or renovation area within the Crossroads District by square feet and acres within the 800 foot radius from the Crossroads Station, as well as within the 800-1200 foot radius. It omits the residential uses along Gentleman Road. They are not a part of this District, although they may be influenced by transit proximity. The TexSan Heart Hospital and medical office building have also been omitted, since they are not considered candidates for redevelopment.

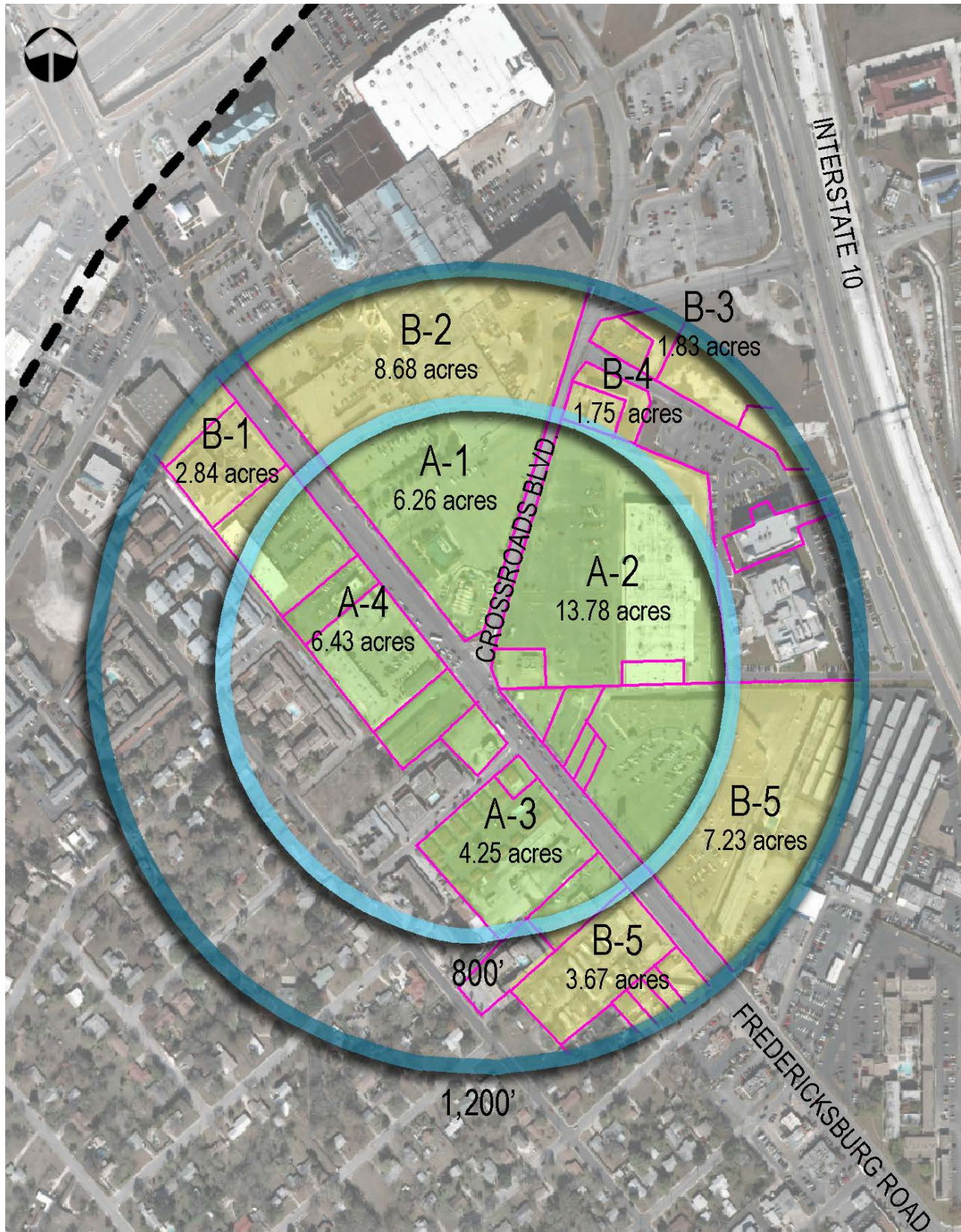
Overall, there are more than 58 acres of development or redevelopment property within the 1200 foot radius. That number can be expanded if full properties were included for sites that are partially touched by the 1200 foot radius. Within the 800 foot radius, the area best suited for retail, entertainment, and higher density development, there are 31.78 acres. In the area between the 800 foot and 1200 foot radii, there are 26.66 acres.

The properties within this area, with a few exceptions, largely represent multiple property owners with relatively small sites. The ease of land assembly and development can be enhanced when large, contiguous sites exist. The largest contiguous site is on the southeast corner of the intersection.



# Master Plan

City of Balcones Heights



Crossroads Boulevard Intersection Station

### **3.3 Development Potential at the Crossroads Boulevard Intersection**

At over 40,000 vehicles per day (ADT, counts taken at the Crossroads Mall), the Crossroads Boulevard intersection has solid automotive traffic volumes to support development and redevelopment. BRT can support and supplement access to this location.

Development opportunities within the primary and secondary TOD zones occur along Fredericksburg Road and Crossroads Boulevard. Most likely, this area would be developed through acquisition, demolition and redevelopment of properties along these streets or by existing individual property owners renovating or redeveloping property.

Existing uses at this key intersection include:

#### **A-1**

- Hobby Lobby
- Denny's
- Whataburger



#### **A-2**

- Gold's Gym
- Vacant
- Krav Maga
- Brothers Sound
- Jackson & Lujan Eye Care Center
- Family Dollar
- Central Finance
- Monarch Dental Association
- Fellas Paredes Clothing Store



#### **A-3**

- Castle Dental Center
- Five State Cleaners
- Cricket
- Budget Rent a Car
- Siesta Inn



#### **A-4**

- Ace Cash Express
- Travis Motel
- Garibaldi Mexican Restaurant
- Mothers Tint and Alarms
- Loans
- Auto Insurance
- Champion Staffing
- J. Champion Dance Studio



- Durity Pub
- Turtle Creek Tavern
- Money Box
- Learning Zone
- Wendys
- WIS
- Farmers Insurance Group
- A & B Hearing Center
- World Finance
- Simis India Cuisine
- Payday Loans
- Babes old Fashioned Food



### B-1

- Vacant
- Lubys
- Avenue
- Queen Cottage
- Deli
- Legends Pharmacy
- Gift Shop



### B-2

- Burlington Coat Factory

### B-3

- Vacant

### B-4

- Vacant
- Firestone



### B-5

- Planet Fitness
- Vacant
- H&R Block
- Rent A Center
- Cash Advance
- Army Career Center
- Golden Kirin Restaurant
- El Marco Apartments



### B-6

- Balcones Heights Community Center
- Citco Gas Station
- Pocket
- Twin Lane Trailer Park
- Cash Advance
- Direct Auto Insurance
- Animal Emergency Hospital



### 3.4 Potential Uses in the Crossroads Blvd. Station Area

- **Ground floor service retail near the transit stop.** Retail at the primary development impact area must be considered in the context of the existing retail at the Crossroads Mall. The width of, and traffic volumes on, the two major streets, Fredericksburg Road and Crossroads Boulevard, make “boutique style” retail problematic. Service-oriented retail, however, within close proximity to the station, is desirable.
- **Office or higher density residential and mixed-use development is potentially feasible on the southern side of Crossroads Boulevard.** The development sites on this side of the street are significant enough to support mid-rise scale development and its related parking requirements. Retail at ground floor level should be encouraged near the station.
- **Limited scale and incremental development of the west side of Fredericksburg Road and the northern side of Crossroads Boulevard.** These areas are subject to multiple property ownerships and smaller scale, narrower depth sites. The iconic Whataburger restaurant arguably occupies the most important and most visible land parcel in the prime development area. A master developer concept can help overcome land assembly issues. The mall site itself may become more feasible for redevelopment if it is incorporated into a comprehensive redevelopment.
- **Low to mid-rise redevelopment or renovation in the secondary development impact zone.** A more positive perception of Fredericksburg Road and Balcones Heights can enhance the development opportunities within approximately the 1200 radius from the transit station. The properties along the west side of Fredericksburg Road are best suited for low scale retail renovations or low to mid-rise office or residential, and mixed-use projects. Parking considerations on these sites will impose a limiting factor on the scale of development.
- **The Crossroads Mall.** The Crossroads Mall will remain a significant retail site in Balcones Heights, even if the BRT station is located at the Crossroads Blvd. intersection. The mall is located at the intersection of two freeways and fronts on a major arterial. It has an existing massing of retail and supportive uses that are important to the economy of Balcones Heights. The majority of the mall buildings are outside of the primary development impact zone. Either the mall will be enhanced incrementally over time, building on the general resurgence of the area, or the mall will be comprehensively redeveloped within a more automotive-oriented development concept. Stronger pedestrian amenities should be incorporated into the second scenario, even though the dominant access would be via the automobile.
- **Streetscape and pedestrian amenities.** With streetscape improvements along Crossroads Boulevard and Fredericksburg Road, a more pedestrian-friendly environment should be created.

### **Potential Development Approaches with Transit-oriented Development**

Transit-oriented development around this intersection location requires the acquisition or control of properties that are owned by different individuals. Therefore, one of several approaches is likely to be followed. Also, the City should have a role in promoting land assembly and/or facilitating appropriate development.

#### **1. *Incremental Approach to Transit-oriented Development***

Under this approach, because of multiple property ownerships, it is assumed that individual property owners will redevelop properties at their own schedule and convenience. The City's interest is to assure that the density and uses on these sites are compatible with the goals and concepts of transit-oriented development. Therefore, development on these properties would need to be controlled through regulation, including ground floor uses and promotion of higher densities. Implementation within this approach would most likely be at a slower pace and more incremental in nature.

#### **2. *Master Developer Approach to Transit-oriented Development***

Under this approach, the City would seek a single "master developer." This developer would control the multiply-owned properties through acquisition or options to purchase. The "master developer" would then prepare an overall development plan, develop the property, and/or seek secondary or co-developers for individual projects.

### **The City's Role in Transit-oriented Development**

The City of Balcones Heights has three distinct roles in promoting quality transit-oriented development in the BRT Station area, no matter its specific location. The first role is regulatory. It involves creating the master planning and regulatory environment that supports appropriate land uses, quality development, and a pedestrian-supportive environment. The second role is promotional. This role involves seeking appropriate developers, encouraging existing owners to redevelop their property and packaging incentives when necessary to attract catalyst development. A third role involves the development of amenities, such as landscape, streetscape and signage, to support pedestrian-oriented and quality development.

### 3.5 A Non-BRT Alternative

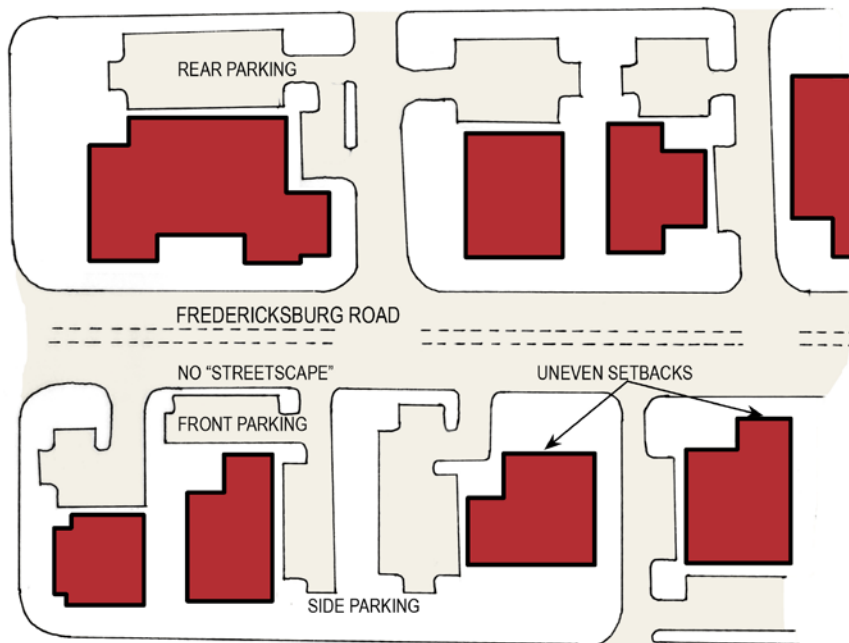
If bus rapid transit is not developed, the development dynamics of Balcones Height will be altered. That does not imply, however, that new development will not occur. It will merely occur at a smaller scale and more incrementally.

A way that the City can change these dynamics is through a major infrastructure investment that will have a catalytic effect on development. That investment would be the improvement of Fredericksburg Road.



*Existing Corridor*

Illustrated in the two drawings are prototypical examples of the existing conditions along Fredericksburg Road. They include non-coordinated automotive-oriented development. Parking may be located to the front of the property. Sometimes, it is on the side of the building, and sometimes, it is to the rear. Setbacks are not uniform. There is no streetscape program to visually unify the streetscape.



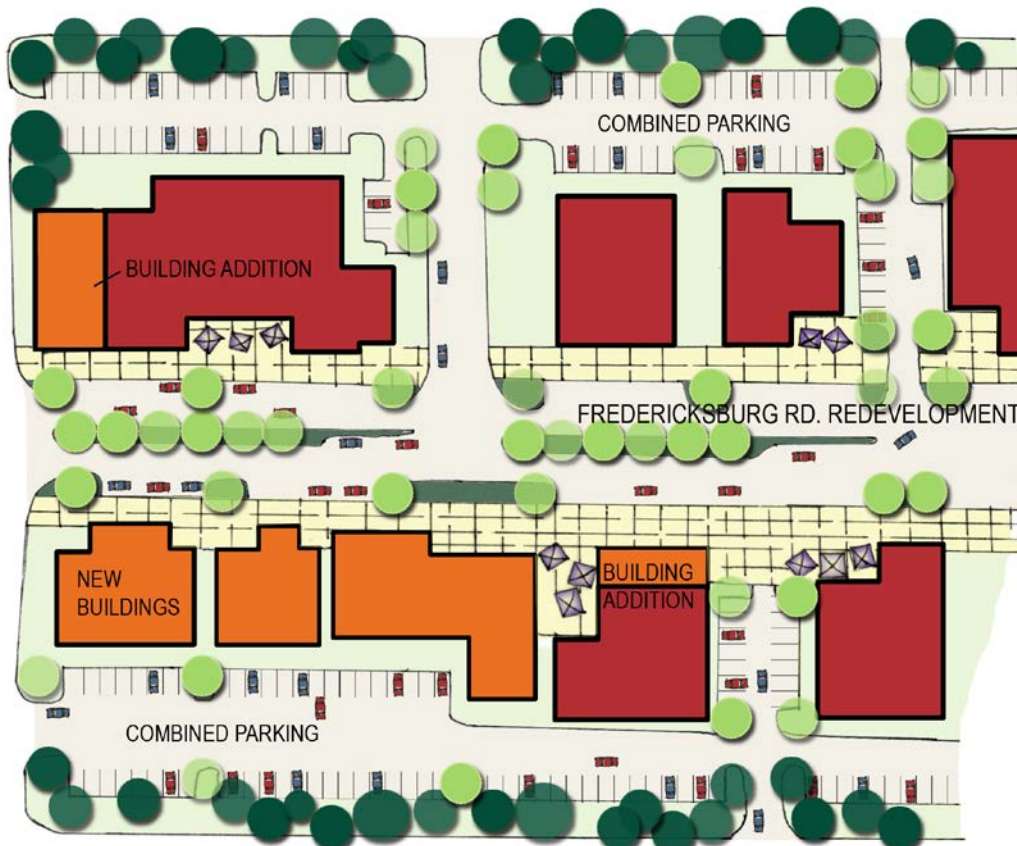
*Existing Conditions on Corridor*

An alternative would be to use the redevelopment of the roadway and its streetscape character to provide unity. It could include a landscape median, turning lanes, parallel on-street parking, and sidewalks. Further, policies can be developed that would



encourage or require greater coordination with regard to building massing and setbacks, as well as more appropriate locations for and connectivity among parking areas.

- **Fredericksburg Road improvements.** In order to promote redevelopment along Fredericksburg Road, a significant development catalyst is necessary. Otherwise, investors, developers, and property owners will not perceive that anything has changed. The most logical effort would be the redevelopment of Fredericksburg Road. If funding can be acquired, the street should be re-crowned and parallel parking, curbs, sidewalks, streetscape, signage, and turning lanes should be provided.



*Alternative Redevelopment along Corridor with Streetscape*

- **Infill, renovation, and selective rebuilding along Fredericksburg Road on Smaller Properties.** Most of the properties along Fredericksburg Road are comparatively small. Many are under single ownership and are only one-half block deep. This makes assembly of large tracts more difficult. In these situations, development will most likely occur on a property by property basis, either through renovation of existing buildings, building additions, or by demolition and new development. The provision of adequate parking will be the most significant limiting factor with regard to the scale of new development on smaller sites.
- **Development promotion on larger properties.** When larger properties exist, or when they can be assembled, a significantly larger scale of development can occur.

Larger sites exist on the southeast corner of Crossroads Boulevard and Fredericksburg Road, as well as along Interstate-10. The Crossroads site is appropriate for mid-rise office or residential uses, with service-oriented ground floor retail. The I-10 site is well-suited for mid-rise office development.

- **Reuse of Crossroads Mall with “thematic” development or by seeking individual “infill” tenants.** The Crossroads Mall should continue to be the subject of development inquiries. There are, however, contractual considerations that may limit significant scale redevelopment. The most likely use for the mall will either be through a new “theming” of the existing mall or through the promotion of new “infill” tenants in the exiting mall.
- **Redevelopment of housing along Gentleman Road.** Without a major transit initiative, there will not be as significant an impetus for new housing development along Gentleman Road. Housing initiative should, however, include new housing development promotion, as well as code enforcement and renovation of the existing housing stock.
- **Regulation through zoning and guidelines.** Ultimately, the future of Balcones Heights’ development in a non-BRT scenario will take place in a largely incremental fashion. To secure appropriate and quality development and redevelopment, the City must establish and enforce clear objectives through the initiation of new zoning regulations and design criteria.

## **Chapter 4. Mixed-use Corridors**

The Master Plan recommends that properties aligning Fredericksburg Road and Crossroads Boulevard be developed and redeveloped within a mixed-use, compact, and transit-oriented concept.

Throughout most of human history, the majority of settlements were developed as mixed-use environments. Before the industrial revolution, walking or horse-back were the primary modes of transport. Therefore, speed of travel was relatively slow, and cities were relatively compact. Some people lived above their work places. Those that did not traverse urban streets and sidewalks filled with merchants and vendors.

As the age of industry approached, horse drawn omnibuses provided an early form of mass transit. This was later replaced by cable cars and electrified streetcars. These transit systems radiated out from the center of the city to outlying areas several miles away. They increased the vitality of the mixed-use urban core and they opened up a series of mixed-use, transit-oriented, suburban neighborhoods.

During the second half of the 20th Century, the automobile and highway and freeway systems became the primary determinant of city form. Cities spread outward along sprawling strip commercial corridors. Zoning became a way of separating uses from each other. Cities became isolated islands of residential, commercial, industrial, and office districts. The once vibrant central cores declined, and downtown retail moved to suburban malls.

In the late 20th Century, it became apparent that mixed-use development had many healthy benefits for cities and suburban communities. The resurgence of rapid transit systems, traffic congestion, air quality concerns, and high fuel prices all contributed to this movement. But many people felt that there was a better and more satisfying way to live—in mixed-use communities. Many communities have revised their zoning laws accordingly, and new, mixed-use ordinances have become more common.

Development guidelines are an effective way of conveying the design intent for a proposed development area. This section of the master plan addresses the principles involved in the creation of mixed-use corridors in Balcones Heights. The primary locations for these corridors are along Fredericksburg Road and Crossroads Boulevard. It does not fully address the redevelopment intent of the Crossroads Mall, which is covered in another section of the plan.

These guidelines address both new development and the renovation of existing strip commercial development. They also address the appropriate planning for the building site.

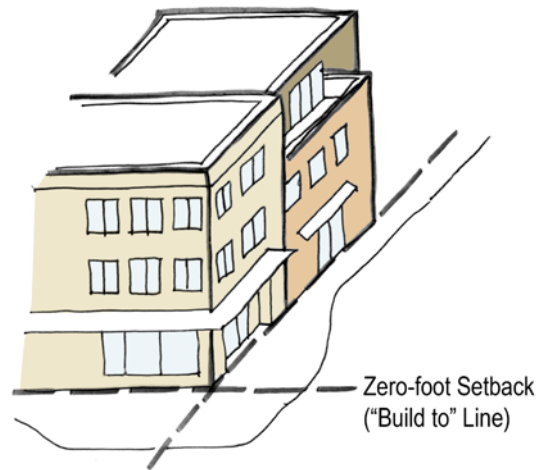
The mixed-use development guidelines are intended to help create a character that exhibits a pre-World War II traditional urban, transit-oriented, and pedestrian-friendly environment that is distinctive within the overall context of suburban San Antonio.

## 4.1 Building Placement

To promote a pedestrian-oriented environment along the proposed mixed-use corridors, it is important to maintain a consistent and active alignment of storefronts. The public street is the primary place for community interaction, and it invites pedestrians to enjoy this environment at a relaxed, comfortable pace. Buildings are the primary elements that frame the pedestrian environment of these corridors. The physical relationship of buildings to the public street creates a unified pedestrian corridor, drawing together the variety of businesses and a mixture of uses along the street.

### New Buildings

- New Buildings shall be constructed to a specified setback (or “build-to” line) from all public streets or sidewalks as defined in the Balcones Heights zoning ordinance, except in the following circumstances:
  - Slight variations in the setback may be allowed at building or business entrances.
- Buildings shall be constructed to a zero-foot setback (or “build-to” line) from all side property lines, except in the following circumstances:
  - Providing a required parking access lane or side parking lot.
- In the case of outdoor public spaces, cafes or courtyards in front of, or on the side of buildings, the “build to” requirement may be met by including an appropriate wall or fence at the lot line.
  - The wall or fence shall be continuous, except for the pedestrian entrance, which shall not be less than 5 feet in width. In no case shall the pedestrian entrance exceed more than 20 % of the linear footage of the front lot line.
  - The wall or fence may be transparent, such as metal ornamental fencing, a masonry wall, or a combination of a masonry wall topped with metal fencing.
  - The wall or fence shall not be over 4 feet high.



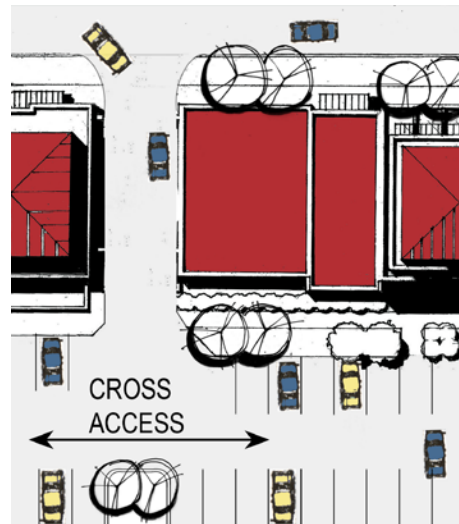


- A wall or fence used to meet the “build to” requirement shall include architectural features in the design that reflect the architectural theme of the building.
- Wood, concrete masonry units, and chain link fences are not acceptable.
- An optional landscape element may be incorporated into the design of the wall or fence for aesthetic purposes.

## 4.2 Parking and Services

Parking along the Fredericksburg Road and Crossroads Boulevard corridors is primarily provided by off-street parking, preferably to the rear of the building, or by limited on-street parking. Limiting on-site parking to the rear allows uses to be concentrated along the pedestrian corridor and ensures active uses on the street frontage. On-street parking serves as a traffic calming device along the mixed use corridors, as they create a buffer between pedestrian activity and moving automobile traffic.

- Off-street parking areas shall be behind the building, if technically feasible.
- Services and deliveries shall utilize secondary or rear entrances to the building whenever possible.
- Rear parking areas shall have shared cross-access lanes or alleys between adjacent properties.



*Rear Parking with Cross-Access Lanes*

## 4.3 Site Access

The pedestrian walk facilitates the movement of people and provides the primary access to buildings along the mixed-use corridors. The pedestrian walk should remain clear of any obstructions. Automobile access to building sites through multiple access drives from the street disrupts the pedestrian environment and shall be minimized to the extent possible.

- Public pedestrian sidewalks shall have a minimum width of 7 feet. At all times a minimum of 7 feet of unobstructed pedestrian access shall be maintained for all pedestrian walks. Americans with Disabilities Act standards shall be met at all times.

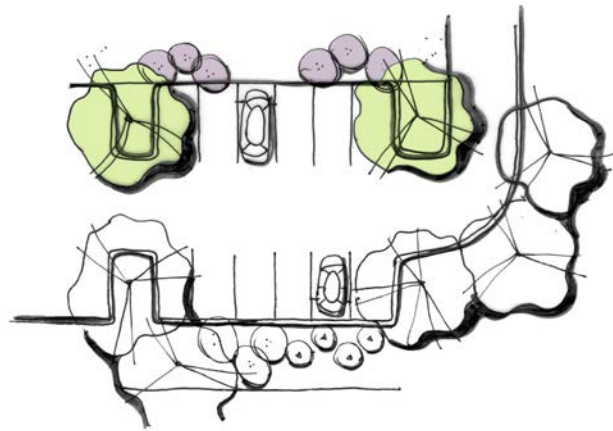
- An 8 foot wide zone shall be provided from the edge of the public sidewalk as the setback or build-to line along the mixed-use corridors. This zone may be used at the property owner's discretion for seasonal or promotional activities and amenities, such as outdoor seating and eating areas, sidewalk sales, bicycle racks, or landscape enhancements. At the property owner's discretion, this zone may also have well-maintained permanent landscape treatment.

#### **4.4 Landscaping**

Private landscaping and streetscape elements provide a seamless transition from the public realm to private businesses. Landscaping can enhance the pedestrian experience in terms of aesthetics, safety, and shelter from the elements. Landscaping may also minimize the visual impact of visual voids such as parking areas, or serve as a transition between uses. There are instances when landscape elements are suggested or required, as indicated below.

- Private landscaping elements shall be consistent with public park/streetscape plants and materials used in this district.
- Seasonal amenities such as portable planters, street trees or other landscaping are encouraged, so long as pedestrian movement is not hindered.
- Any off-street parking area that directly abuts a pedestrian walkway shall incorporate landscape features along the perimeter of the parking lot. A minimum 5 foot landscape area shall be maintained between the public right-of-way and the off-street parking area. Landscaping shall include combinations of ground cover, seasonal color, trees, and ornamental fencing.
- In addition to landscaping, parking lots, when adjacent to pedestrian walk and sidewalks along the mixed-use corridors, shall preserve the presence of the specified setback or "build to" line through a wall, fencing and/or landscape element.
  - The wall, fence, and/or landscape element shall be continuous, except for the pedestrian and vehicle entrance. The pedestrian and vehicle entrance shall not exceed more than 20 % of the linear footage of the wall or fence line, except that a minimum 5 foot pedestrian entrance and 12 foot vehicle entrance is required.
  - The wall or fencing should be transparent, such as wrought iron ornamental fencing with masonry pylons terminating the fencing at each end or corner of the parking area or a combination of masonry wall topped with wrought iron

- fencing. Landscape elements shall be of a density that prevents access by pedestrians.
- The wall or fencing shall include architectural features in the design that reflect the architectural theme of the adjacent building.
  - The wall or fence shall not be over 4 feet high.
  - Wood and chain link fences are not acceptable.
- All off-street parking areas shall be required to provide internal landscaped islands according to the requirements of the Balcones Height Zoning Ordinance.
- Landscaped islands should be designed in an aesthetic manner that also functionally delineates internal vehicle circulation and accommodates pedestrian movement through the parking area.
  - Landscaped islands and other landscape elements shall receive adequate and routine maintenance to ensure the survivability of the plantings, and should provide irrigation systems if required.



### Screening

Screening undesirable or unsightly areas is essential to an aesthetically pleasing environment.

- Waste receptacles, dumpsters, and ground level mechanical equipment shall be screened from public view by walls, with an operable door or gate for access.
- Whether on-site or incorporated into the building, the preferred screening treatment is a solid wall enclosure compatible with the materials, colors and architectural style of the building. No wood fencing shall be allowed.
- Additional landscape screening around the enclosure is encouraged when feasible. The landscape buffer should be irrigated and



maintained to help plantings survive.

- Screened areas shall be located to the rear or secondary side of the building in order to minimize visual impacts.

## 4.5 Buildings

The massing of buildings along the street frontage forms the physical enclosure of the street. Scale, placement, and detailing of buildings can greatly influence the nature of the pedestrian environment.

### Building Scale

The relative size or mass of a building in relation to adjacent buildings is one of the primary ways to achieve design continuity along the mixed-use corridors in Balcones Heights. Buildings of different scale should transition smoothly along a block.

- In order to achieve a degree of building scale compatibility, buildings along the mixed-use corridors shall generally be limited to heights as specified in the Balcones Heights zoning ordinance.



### Building Uses

The mixed-use corridors should promote an active street-life with “storefronts” along pedestrian walks. The appropriate mix of uses creates important destinations within walking distance. This facilitates a “park-once” concept for a variety of daily activities in lieu of moving the car among destinations, and increases pedestrian life along the sidewalk. Similarly, trip origins near important destinations make walking a realistic transportation option within and around Balcones Heights.





- It is preferred that ground floor areas along the corridors be used only for retail, restaurants or offices and institutions that cater to pedestrian traffic. Buildings that are 100% residential should have visible lobby oriented to the street.
- Upper floors of buildings may be used for offices, residences or as an upper level of retail or restaurants that are related directly to the ground floor use.

### **Building Materials**

Balcones Heights does not have a significant architectural historical precedent upon which to draw. A variety of building materials, therefore, may be appropriate for new development along the mixed-use corridors. The design of a newer building should have a dominant material on its facades, with secondary materials providing architectural accents.

- A single, dominant building wall material shall cover greater than 70% of all exterior building faces, exclusive of glazing.
- Secondary materials should be used only to accent the architectural character of the building.
- Wood, vinyl siding, unfinished concrete block shall not be used as the primary material on any exterior building face.

### **Architectural Detailing**

Architectural detailing is a way of embellishing or decorating a single dominant building material. It also adds finer grain of texture and scale to a building façade.

- Architectural detailing in the form of soldier or sailor courses, corbels, other decorative applications or materials, such as terra cotta, wood, or metal may be used to contribute scale and texture to a building façade.
- A tower or a pediment at a building's cornice line may also be used to enhance the character or massing of a façade, providing its design contributes to a consistent architectural style for the building.



*Corbel*



*Pediment*

## Roofs

The building roof not only provides protection from weather, but also can enhance or detract from the design image of an area.

- Flat, arched, sloped or slightly sloped roofs (for drainage) may be used for primary building roofs along the mixed-use corridors.
- Parapets may be incorporated on any façade to provide screening for mechanical equipment or for aesthetic reasons.
- A variety of roof forms may be used in secondary conditions, such as a roof over an outdoor eating area or a building entrance canopy.



*Parapet*

## Awnings/Canopies

Canopies or awnings are prominent elements in an active street environment. They provide sun control, protect the store window, add color, and, in some instances, may be used for signage.

- Awnings, fixed or retractable, of opaque fabric, or solid metal material shall be on a securely mounted metal frame.
- Awnings shall be mounted above the pedestrian walk with their lowest point ranging from 7'-6" minimum to 9'-0" maximum. Exceptions may be made for awnings above sloped sites or sidewalks.
- Awnings shall be the same color, pattern, and have the same mounting characteristics for a single business. Awnings on a single building shall have a consistent horizontal alignment across the front of the entire building, unless the slope of the pedestrian walk or ground requires a horizontal stagger.
- Permanent canopies or marquees may be used at the primary building entry, particularly at places of assembly or restaurants. To be approved, the design of canopies or marquees shall be consistent with the design theme of the building and the block.
- Awnings shall receive routine and proper maintenance so that they remain free of rips, holes, stains or fading at all times.



*Alignment of Awnings*



*Acceptable*



*Unacceptable*

### **Enhanced Entrances**

A front entrance should be emphasized as a special and unique place on the building's store front and draw pedestrian traffic into the buildings.

- Entrances should be recessed, slightly projected or enhanced through color, materials, or special paving treatment.
- Rear or secondary public entrances should be provided from rear parking areas and public access alleys.
- There shall be a secondary building or business sign at all rear entrances.
- Glazing, at or near the door, should be incorporated at rear entrances.



*Enhanced  
Entrance*

### **The Building Front**

Storefront fenestration, the arrangement of doors and windows, helps communicate the nature of a building's use and character. Storefront windows create a vibrant image and communicate unique messages to the pedestrian and on-street traffic along the mixed-use corridors.

- All buildings or businesses shall have a primary public entrance that faces a public street.
- The ground level of a storefront shall be "transparent" with a 70% clear glass minimum.

- Storefront displays shall be uncluttered and artistic. Storefront displays shall incorporate decorative accent lighting for nighttime use.
- Upper floors shall not have greater than 40% windows glazing.
- Glass on upper floors shall be transparent, not mirrored or colored, except for solar protective tinting.
- Building lighting should be incorporated on all building façades facing a public street, alley or on-site parking, to enhance the building's architectural detailing and/or to light the pedestrian walk, alley or parking area.
- Building lighting shall be compatible with the building's architectural theme.
- Standard "wall pack" lighting systems, non-white color lighting, and lighting systems that emit glare are prohibited.



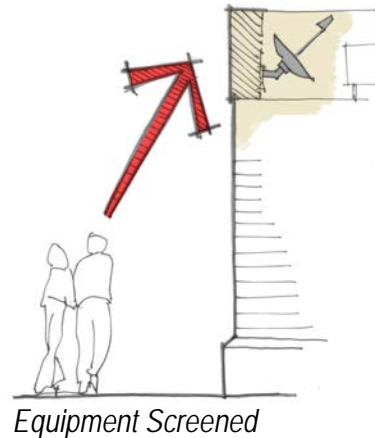
### Specialty Equipment and Functions

Specialty equipment that is necessary to support the uses in the building and may be designed and used as an integral part of the building. Keeping specialty equipment out of the public view can minimize the negative visual impact caused by the accumulation of a large number of equipment facilities that are necessary to support the activities along mixed-use corridors.

- Equipment such as satellite dishes, antennas and other specialty equipment shall not be mounted on any building façade.



- Any roof mounted specialty or mechanical equipment shall be screened from public view. The screening treatment shall be integrated with the overall building design with the use of complementary materials, colors and architectural style of the building.
- Drive thru windows shall not occur on a primary building façade or building front. Drive thru windows shall be located to the rear or side of the building. If they exist in a side yard location, they should not be easily viewed from the street.
- Window air-conditioning units shall not be allowed on any façade.
- Pipes, conduit, and cables are limited to the back façade of buildings if conditions do not allow for them to be enclosed within the building itself. They shall be located as far away from public view as practical.
- Exterior stairs (if any) shall be located to a rear or secondary side of a building to minimize the visibility of the stairs.



## 4.6 Building Signs

Building signs not only provide identification for businesses and building uses, they can also enhance or detract from the character of the built environment. Great care must be taken in the type and placement of signs on buildings. It must be recognized that different signage types have distinctly different purposes in communicating with people in vehicles or with pedestrians.

### **Allowed Sign: Location and Purpose**

Each type of sign on a building serves a specific purpose and its location will determine how well that purpose is served. Primary signs are a building's or business's primary identification for people traversing the corridor. They are generally viewable by on-street traffic. Secondary signs complement the primary sign and provide more detailed information or give direction to downtown patrons. Pedestrian oriented signs are the primary identification for pedestrian traffic and are designed and located to reflect this

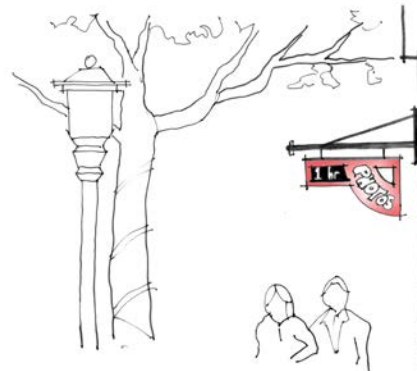
human scale. This hierarchy of signs breaks down the information provided for buildings along the mixed-use corridors, so that messages are clearly communicated.

- One wall sign shall be allowed as the Primary Sign on each building façade for each ground level business or commercial establishment. In the case of a ground level business or commercial establishment with four building facades, no more than three facades shall have a Primary Sign.



- The primary sign size shall not exceed 10% *Primary Sign* of the total area of the façade on which it is placed.
- The sign shall not extend above the height of the wall on which it is mounted.
- In lieu of one wall sign, one projecting sign or awning sign shall be allowed for each ground level business or commercial establishment.
- Projecting signs shall be no greater than 10 square feet.
- The following Secondary Signs shall be allowed on buildings along the mixed-use corridors:
  - One secondary or rear entrance sign at each such entrance, stating the name of the business or commercial establishment, and not exceeding 10 square feet.
  - One directory sign at each common entrance to a building serving multiple businesses and commercial establishments, stating the name and suite number of each business or commercial establishment. The letters are limited to no greater than one inch high and the total sign area shall not exceed 6 square feet.
  - Restaurants and cafes (not providing drive-through service) shall be permitted one wall-mounted display, not exceeding 4 square feet, featuring the actual menu used at the dining table, to be contained within a shallow wood or metal case. The display case shall be attached to the building wall and may be lighted.
- Each ground level business or commercial establishment shall be allowed one Pedestrian Sign. Pedestrian-oriented signs should be located on entry awnings, directly above business entrances, or projecting/hanging adjacent to entrances.

- Pedestrian signs are limited to 5 square feet; shall be a minimum of 7 feet at its lowest point above the ground or sidewalk.
- In lieu of the pedestrian sign, one wall mounted, non-illuminated sign, not larger than 3 square feet may be placed at the primary entrance of each ground level business or commercial establishment. The highest point of this sign shall not exceed 7 feet from the ground or sidewalk.
- Each primary business entrance or major building entrance for a multi-tenant building shall have an address displayed on or above the door.



*Pedestrian-Oriented Sign*

- The following are exempt, and not counted in the application of the guidelines in this district:
  - Cornerstones stating the name and date of a building and incorporated into the building design as an architectural feature.
  - Miscellaneous window signs directly related to the business or commercial establishment provided the total sign area does not exceed 10% of the window area of the business or commercial establishment.
  - Temporary signs in association with a Special Event Permit.



*Misc. Window Sign*

### **Sign Placement and Building Architectural Design**

Signs should not obscure architectural features; instead, their design should be integrated with the design of the building.

- Signs shall fit within the existing façade features, shall be confined to “signable areas,” and shall not interfere with door and window openings, conceal architectural details, or obscure the composition of the façade.
  - Signs should be mounted in locations that respect the design of a building, including the arrangement of bays and openings.
  - Wall-mounted signs on friezes, lintels, spandrels, and fascias over storefront windows should be sized to fit within these surfaces and not extend above, below or beyond them. Typically, a wall-mounted sign should be centered on a horizontal surface (e.g., over a storefront opening).
- Sign size shall be scaled to be appropriate with the size of the building on which it is placed and the area on which it is located. The size and shape of a sign

should be proportional with the scale of the structure. Legibility is critical to sign effectiveness and to the overall effect on the surrounding uses and the district.

- Only one message shall be used on a Primary Sign, either the name of the business or building. Address, phone numbers, products or other information shall not be included on a Primary Sign.
- Corporate logos or registered trademarks may be used in a Primary Sign in addition to the business or building name. The logo or trademark shall be included in the maximum sign area.



*Logo Incorporated*

- Signs can make a positive contribution to the surrounding environment, as well as help identify and define a district, area or neighborhood. Imaginative and innovative sign designs are considered a community enhancement.

- Creative, detailed, artistic and unique signage is encouraged and will be considered in the context of the building on which the sign will be located, surrounding uses, sign design (color, materials, scale, detailing), and appropriateness in meeting and reinforcing the goals and purposes of the district.
- The use of icons, symbols, graphic logos or designs that represent a service, occupation or product are preferable to standardized corporate logos.



*Creative Sign*

### Materials and Mounting

Permanent, securely mounted signs are preferred to all other options.

- The following sign materials are recommended:
  - Wood (carved, sandblasted, etched, and properly sealed, primed and painted or stained).
  - Metal (formed, etched, cast, engraved and properly primed and painted or factory coated to protect against corrosion).
  - High density pre-formed foam or similar material if properly designed in a manner consistent with these guidelines and painted or otherwise finished.
  - Custom neon tubing in the form of logos or lettering.
- The following sign types are allowed:



- Individual cut-out letters or graphics mounted directly on a wall or contrasting surface, and projecting no more than one foot from the wall or contrasting surface.
  - Letters or graphics mounted, carved, or painted on a contrasting surface that forms the outline of the sign.
  - Non-illuminated letters or graphics painted or mounted directly on an interior window surface. Interior window signs should not exceed the lesser of 10 square feet or 30% of the area of the window in which it is mounted.
  - Architecturally integrated sign boards.
  - Box and cabinet signs shall not be used.
  - No signs, except flags and pedestrian signs, shall be suspended by chains or other devices that would allow the sign to swing due to wind action. Signs shall be anchored to prevent any lateral movement that would cause wear on the sign face or supporting members or connections.
- All electrical transformer boxes and raceways should be concealed from public view. If a raceway cannot be mounted internally— behind the finished exterior wall – the exposed metal surfaces of the raceway shall be finished to match the background wall, or integrated into the overall design of the sign.
  - All exposed conduits shall be concealed from public view.

### **Surrounding Environment**

Residential and commercial uses may exist in close proximity along the mixed-use corridors. Minimizing the impact that signs have, beyond their intended purpose, allows this mix of uses to coexist and enhances the overall character of the district

Signs should be designed and located so that they have little or no impact on adjacent residential neighborhoods.

## **Chapter 5: Commercial Renovation**

A significant portion of the commercial development in Balcones Heights was developed with an eye to the automobile as the dominant means of transportation. In the post World War II era in the United States, the design and development of commercial corridors transformed from streetcar, bus, and pedestrian-oriented corridors to strip commercial automotive corridors. Thus, the physical form of commercial was transformed from a tight knit, sidewalk and street-oriented form of development to a spread out, parking lot-oriented form of development.

The intent of the commercial renovation guidelines is to provide property owners and the City of Balcones Heights with a policy to implement a consistent and higher quality design character throughout the city. This should take place regardless of whether development comes in the form of new construction or, as described in this chapter, through building and site renovation.

### **5.1 Definition: Substantial Construction or Renovation**

These guidelines will be applied only in instances of substantial construction or renovation of an existing building or site. Substantial construction or renovation exists in any building or site when at least 50% of the building's floor plan by area or site by area is subjected to renovation or alteration, or when the cost of renovation or construction exceeds 50% of the assessed valuation prior to the construction or renovation.

"Cosmetic" improvements, such as painting, acquisition of new furniture, changing light fixtures, maintenance for normal "wear and tear," or similar minor alterations do not typically constitute substantial construction. If, however, these improvements exceed 50% of the assessed value of the building, they are defined as substantial construction.

If a determination has been made that a state of substantial construction or renovation exists, then the property owner will be subject to the design guidelines for both the building's façade and its property or site.

### **5.2 Placement for Additional Buildings on a Property**

It is desirable to establish a development pattern that promotes a cohesive visual appearance in Balcones Heights. It is important, therefore, to "anchor" the front of the site and/or the corners of corner lots with buildings, bringing building activities close to the street. This guideline establishes a building placement pattern that shall be used regardless of the size, scale, or location of new development within a site.

For all new buildings or building additions, to the extent practical, the following guidelines shall apply:

- New buildings or building additions shall be constructed to a specified setback (or “build-to” line) from all public streets or sidewalks as defined in the Balcones Heights zoning ordinance, except in the following circumstances:
  - Slight variations in the setback may be allowed at building or business entrances.
- Buildings shall be constructed to a zero-foot setback (or “build-to” line) from all side property lines, except in the following circumstances:
  - Providing a required parking access lane or side parking lot.
- In the case of outdoor public spaces, cafes or courtyards in front of, or on the side of buildings, the “build to” requirement may be met by including an appropriate wall or fence at the lot line.
  - The wall or fence shall be continuous, except for the pedestrian entrance, which shall not be less than 5 feet in width. In no case shall the pedestrian entrance exceed more than 20 % of the linear footage of the front lot line.
  - The wall or fence may be transparent, such as metal ornamental fencing, a masonry wall, or a combination of a masonry wall topped with metal fencing.
  - The wall or fence shall not be over 4 feet high.
  - A wall or fence used to meet the “build to” requirement shall include architectural features in the design that reflect the architectural theme of the building.
  - Wood and chain link fences are prohibited.
  - An optional landscape element may be incorporated into the design of the wall or fence for aesthetic purposes.
- If the need to provide parking or unique site considerations makes it difficult or impossible to meet these building placement guidelines, then the City shall work with the property owner to achieve the “spirit” or “intent” of the guidelines to the extent possible.

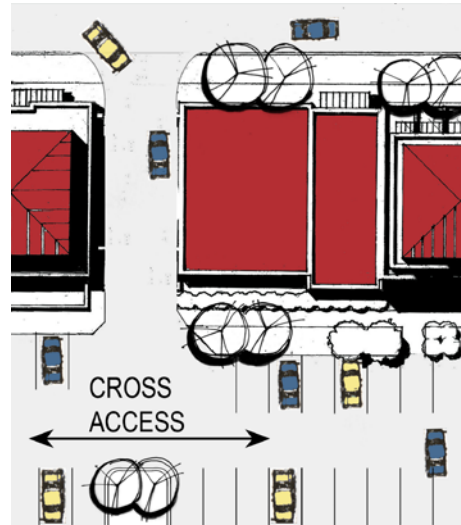
### **5.3 Site**

It is the intent of these guidelines to support continuity of site character among all commercial properties in Balcones Heights

## Parking

For sites in which no new buildings are constructed, and buildings have a front yard setback, the following guidelines shall apply:

- Existing parking in front of or on the sides of buildings that is required to comply with the zoning ordinance is allowed to remain. It is the intent of these guidelines to create a single parking area among adjacent sites in a block interior or behind buildings whenever possible.
- Cross-access easements and shared parking between parking lots on adjacent properties are desirable. This reduces automobile movement and minimizes curb cuts at the street. The City shall require the creation of cross access easements when practical, allowing access to adjacent property owners, present or future, as a condition of development approvals.
- Pedestrian connections are required between parking lots on adjacent properties.
- Parking Requirements shall be as established by the Balcones Heights' Zoning Ordinance.



*Rear Parking with Cross-Access Lanes*

## Protection of Adjacent Residential Uses

It is important that commercial uses and their parking and deliveries do not have a detrimental impact on adjacent residential uses.

- All parking, loading, delivery, or service facilities behind buildings shall be separated from any residential use on adjacent property by a minimum 15-foot landscaped buffer. The landscaped buffer shall provide a year-round visibility screen from the site for the adjacent residential uses and minimize light and sound impacts from the site.
  - No loudspeaker in such area shall be located within 100 feet of a property line of a residential use and shall be directed away and imperceptible from the residential property.
  - All light sources in such areas shall be directed away from the residential use by shields, so that no direct light source is viewable from the property line of the residential use.



## Site Access

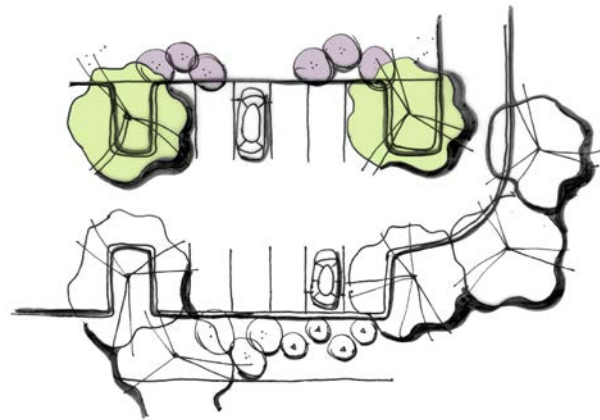
Sites in Balcones Heights should be accessible by a variety of methods, including pedestrian access, public transit, bicycles, and automobiles. An abundance of curb cuts allow automobile access to a site to hinder traffic flow and street parking, as well as disrupt the pedestrian travel along sidewalks.

- Curb cuts onto a site's front yard shall be minimized. Access to sites by a single mid-block entrance with cross access easements or by alleys behind buildings is required wherever feasible.
  - No more than one curb cut per site be allowed onto an arterial, unless the front property dimension exceeds 300 feet in length. The City may allow a temporary curb cut for access to an arterial until site access can be achieved through a cross access easement. When such access is obtained, the temporary curb cut shall be removed.
  - Curb cuts may not be located closer than 150 feet, centerline to centerline, unless unique physical site constraints require a shorter distance.
  - No curb cut shall be allowed within 150 feet of a street intersection, unless unique physical site constraints require a shorter distance.
  - If another jurisdiction has an established standard for curb cuts that differs from Balcones Heights' standard, then the longer of the two dimensions will govern.
- A continuous pedestrian walk shall be required along all public streets.
  - The pedestrian walk may only be interrupted by vehicle access lanes. Accessible curb cuts and designated crosswalks shall be provided at each such location. Pedestrian walk interruptions shall be limited to no greater than 22 feet wide for each public street frontage.
  - Pedestrian walks shall be a minimum of 7 feet in width. Properties on streets covered by the streetscape standards in The Public Realm chapter shall conform to those standards. Americans with Disabilities Act standards shall be met at all times.
- In addition to the pedestrian walk along public streets, a "storefront" pedestrian walk shall be provided according to the following standards:
  - It shall be at least 7 feet in width.
  - It shall be continuous across the entire store frontage.
  - It shall connect to pedestrian walks along the street via a pedestrian sidewalk.
  - On-site bicycle racks near entrances, parking areas, or transit facilities are recommended.

## Landscaping

Private landscaping and streetscape elements provide a seamless transition from the public realm to private businesses and residences. Landscaping can enhance the pedestrian experience in terms of aesthetics, safety, and shelter from the elements. Landscaping may also minimize the visual impact of parking areas, or serve as a transition between uses.

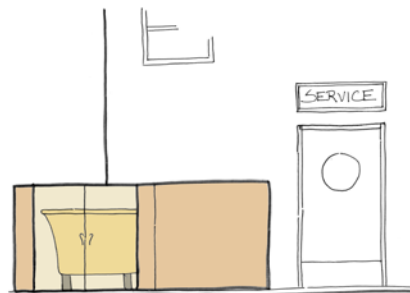
- Landscape elements shall be placed in the following locations:
  - Screening ground level equipment.
  - In any required parking area islands.
  - In the buffer area required for any adjacent residential uses.
  - Any other appropriate location to enhance the aesthetics of the site.
- Private landscaping elements:
  - Landscaped islands should be designed to functionally delineate internal vehicle circulation and accommodate pedestrian movement.
  - All landscape elements shall receive adequate and routine maintenance to ensure the survivability of the plantings, and shall provide irrigation systems or utilize native vegetation that requires no irrigation system.



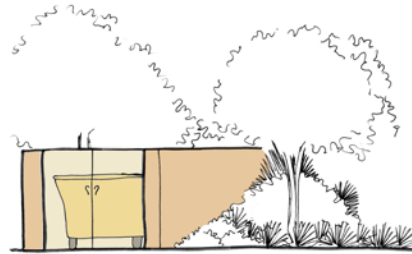
## Screening

Screening undesirable areas is essential to an aesthetically pleasing environment.

- Waste receptacles, dumpsters, mechanical equipment and outdoor storage areas shall be screened on all sides and have an operable door or gate for access.
- Whether on-site or incorporated into the building, the preferred screening treatment is a wall enclosure compatible with the materials, colors and architectural style of the building.



- Additional landscape plantings or screening around the enclosure is encouraged when feasible.
- These screened areas shall be located to the rear or secondary side of the building in order to minimize visual impacts from the street or sidewalk.



## 5.4 Buildings

In a significant renovation of an existing structure, guidelines shall generally conform to the guidelines for new buildings to the extent practical (as determined by the City).

### Dominant Building Material

The façade materials of a substantially renovated building shall, whenever possible, be altered and updated as follows:

- A single, dominant building wall material shall cover greater than 70% of all exterior building faces, exclusive of glazing.
- Secondary materials should be used only to accent the architectural character of the building.
- Wood, vinyl siding, unfinished concrete block shall not be used as the primary material on any exterior building face.

### Architectural Detailing

Architectural detailing is a way of embellishing or decorating a single dominant building material in a substantial renovation. It also adds finer grain of texture and scale to a building façade.

- Architectural detailing in the form of soldier or sailor courses, corbels, other decorative applications or materials, such as terra cotta, wood, or metal may be used to contribute scale and texture to a building façade.
- A tower or a pediment at a building's cornice line may also be used to enhance the character or massing of a façade, providing its design contributes to a consistent architectural style for the building.



*Corbel*



*Pediment*

## Roofs

The building roof not only provides protection from weather, but it also can enhance or detract from the design image of an area.

- Flat, arched, sloped, or slightly sloped roofs (for drainage) may be used for primary building roofs.
- Parapets may be incorporated on any façade to provide screening for mechanical equipment or for aesthetic reasons.
- Sloped roofs may be used in secondary conditions, such as a roof over an outdoor eating area or a building entrance canopy.
- Mansard style or false roofs shall not be used.

## Awnings/Canopies

Canopies or awnings can prominent elements in renovated buildings. They provide sun control, protect the store window, add color, and, in some instances, may be used for signage.

- Awnings, fixed or retractable, shall be made of opaque fabric on a securely mounted metal frame.
- Awnings shall be mounted in an angled configuration (sloping up from above the pedestrian walk to the building face) with their lowest point ranging from 7'-6" minimum to 9'-0" maximum.
- Arched, barreled, or horizontal awnings shall not be used.
- Awnings shall be the same color, pattern, and have the same mounting characteristics for a single business. Awnings on a single building shall have a consistent horizontal alignment across the front of the entire building, unless the slope of the pedestrian walk or ground requires a stagger.
- Permanent canopies or marquees may be used at the primary building entry, particularly at places of assembly or restaurants. To be approved, the design of canopies or marquees shall be consistent with the design theme of the building and the block.



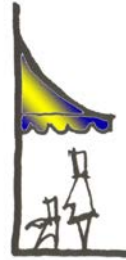
*Alignment of Awnings*



- Awnings shall receive routine and proper maintenance so that they remain free of rips, holes, stains or fading at all times.



*Acceptable*



*Unacceptable*

### **Enhanced Entrances**

A front entrance should be emphasized as a special and unique place on the building's storefront and draw pedestrian traffic into the buildings.

- Entrances should be recessed, slightly projected or enhanced through color, materials, or special paving treatment.
- Rear or secondary public entrances may be provided from rear parking areas and public access alleys.
- There shall be a secondary building or business sign at all rear entrances.
- Glazing, at or near the door, should be incorporated at rear entrances.



*Enhanced  
Entrance*

### **The Building Front**

Storefront fenestration, the arrangement of doors and windows, helps communicate the nature of a building's use and character. Storefront windows create a vibrant image and communicate unique messages to the pedestrian and on-street traffic.

- All buildings or businesses shall have a primary public entrance that faces a public street. Buildings undergoing a substantial renovation shall have their main entrance relocated to the front of the building.

- The ground level of a storefront shall be “transparent” with a 70% clear glass minimum.
- Storefront displays shall be uncluttered and artistic. Storefront displays shall incorporate decorative accent lighting for nighttime use.
- Upper floors shall not have greater than 40% windows glazing.
- Glass on upper floors shall be transparent, not mirrored or colored, except for solar protective tinting.
- Building lighting should be incorporated on all building façades facing a public street, alley or on-site parking, to enhance the building’s architectural detailing and/or to light the pedestrian walk, alley or parking area.
  - Building lighting shall be compatible with the building’s architectural theme.
  - Standard “wall pack” lighting systems, non-white color lighting, and lighting systems that emit glare are prohibited.

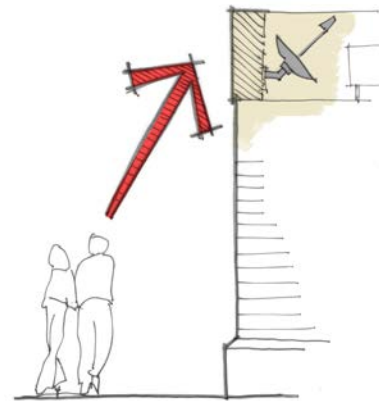


### Specialty Equipment and Functions

Specialty equipment that is necessary to support the uses in the building and may be designed and used as an integral part of the building. Keeping specialty equipment out of the public view can minimize the negative visual impact caused by the accumulation

of a large number of equipment facilities that are necessary to support the activities in a renovated building.

- Equipment such as satellite dishes, antennas and other specialty equipment shall not be mounted on any building façade.
- Any roof mounted specialty or mechanical equipment shall be screened from public view. The screening treatment shall be integrated with the overall building design with the use of complementary materials, colors and architectural style of the building to the extent possible.



*Equipment Screened*

- Drive-thru windows shall not occur on a primary building façade or building front. It is preferred that drive thru windows be located to the rear of the building. If they exist in a side yard location, they should not be easily viewed from the street.
- Window air-conditioning units shall not be visible on any facade.
- Pipes, conduit, and cables are limited to the back façade of buildings if conditions do not allow for them to be enclosed within the building itself. They shall be located as far away from public view as practical.
- Exterior stairs (if any) shall be located to a rear or secondary side of a building to minimize the visibility of the stairs.

## 5.5 Building Signs

Building signs not only provide identification for businesses and building uses, they can also enhance or detract from the character of the built environment. Great care must be taken in the type and placement of signs on buildings. It must be recognized that different signage types have distinctly different purposes in communicating with people in vehicles or with pedestrians.

## Allowed Signs: Location and Purpose

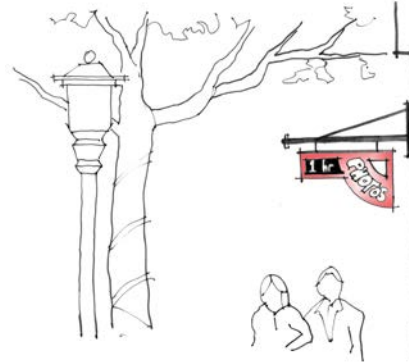
Each type of sign on a building serves a specific purpose and its location will determine how well that purpose is served. Primary signs are a building's or business's primary identification for people. They are generally viewable by on-street traffic. Secondary signs complement the primary sign and provide more detailed information or give direction to downtown patrons. Pedestrian-oriented signs are the primary identification for pedestrian traffic and are designed and located to reflect this human scale. This hierarchy of signs breaks down the information provided for renovated commercial buildings, so that messages are clearly communicated.



*Primary Sign*

- One wall sign shall be allowed as the Primary Sign on each building façade for each ground level business or commercial establishment. In the case of a ground level business or commercial establishment with four building facades, no more than three facades shall have a Primary Sign.
  - The primary sign size shall not exceed 10% of the total area of the façade on which it is placed.
  - It shall not extend above the height of the wall on which it is mounted.
  - In lieu of one wall sign, one projecting sign or awning sign shall be allowed for each ground level business or commercial establishment.
  - Projecting signs shall be no greater than 10 square feet.
- The following Secondary Signs shall be allowed on renovated buildings:
  - One secondary or rear entrance sign at each such entrance, stating the name of the business or commercial establishment, and not exceeding 10 square feet.
  - One directory sign at each common entrance to a building serving multiple businesses and commercial establishments, stating the name and suite number of each business or commercial establishment. The letters are limited to no greater than one inch high and the total sign area shall not exceed 6 square feet.
  - Restaurants and cafes (not providing drive-through service) shall be permitted one wall-mounted display, not exceeding 4 square feet, featuring the actual menu used at the dining table, to be contained within a shallow wood or metal case. The display case shall be attached to the building wall and may be lighted.

- Each ground level business or commercial establishment shall be allowed one Pedestrian Sign. Pedestrian-oriented signs should be located on entry awnings, directly above business entrances, or projecting/hanging adjacent to entrances.
  - Pedestrian signs are limited to 5 square feet; shall be a minimum of 7 feet at its lowest point above the ground or sidewalk.
  - In lieu of the pedestrian sign, one wall mounted, non-illuminated sign, not larger than 3 square feet may be placed at the primary entrance of each ground level business or commercial establishment. The highest point of this sign shall not exceed 7 feet from the ground or sidewalk.
  - Each primary business entrance or major building entrance for a multi-tenant building shall have an address displayed on or above the door.
- The following are exempt, and not counted in the application of the guidelines in this district:
  - Cornerstones stating the name and date of a building and incorporated into the building design as an architectural feature.
  - Miscellaneous window signs directly related to the business or commercial establishment provided the total sign area does not exceed 10% of the window area of the business or commercial establishment.
  - Temporary signs in association with a Special Event Permit.



*Pedestrian-Oriented Sign*



*Misc. Window Sign*

### Sign Placement and Building Architectural Design

Signs should not obscure architectural features; instead, their design should be integrated with the design of the building.

- Signs shall fit within the existing façade features and shall be confined to a “signable area,” defined as an area that does not interfere with door and window openings, conceal architectural details, or obscure the composition of the façade.



- Signs shall be mounted in locations that respect the design of a building, including the arrangement of bays and openings.
- Wall-mounted signs on friezes, lintels, spandrels, and fascias over storefront windows shall be sized to fit within these surfaces and not extend above, below or beyond them. Typically, a wall-mounted sign should be centered on a horizontal surface (e.g., over a storefront opening).
- Sign size shall be scaled to be appropriate with the size of the building on which it is placed and the area on which it is located. The size and shape of a sign should be proportional with the scale of the structure. Legibility is critical to sign effectiveness and to the overall effect on the surrounding uses and the district.
  - Only one message shall be used on a Primary Sign, either the name of the business or building. Address, phone numbers, products or other information shall not be included on a Primary Sign.
  - Corporate logos or registered trademarks may be used in a Primary Sign in addition to the business or building name. The logo or trademark shall be included in the maximum sign area.



*Logo Incorporated*

- Signs can make a positive contribution to the surrounding environment, as well as help identify and define a district, area or neighborhood. Imaginative and innovative sign designs are considered a community enhancement.
  - Creative, detailed, artistic and unique signage is encouraged and will be considered in the context of the building on which the sign will be located, surrounding uses, sign design (color, materials, scale, detailing), and appropriateness in meeting and reinforcing the goals and purposes of the district.



*Creative Sign*

## Materials and Mounting

Permanent, securely mounted signs are preferred to all other options.

- The following sign materials are recommended:
  - Wood (carved, sandblasted, etched, and properly sealed, primed and painted or stained);
  - Metal (formed, etched, cast, engraved and properly primed and painted or factory coated to protect against corrosion);

- High density pre-formed foam or similar material if properly designed in a manner consistent with these guidelines and painted or otherwise finished;
  - Custom neon tubing in the form of logos or lettering.
- The following sign types are allowed:
  - Individual cut-out letters or graphics mounted directly on a wall or contrasting surface, and projecting no more than one foot from the wall or contrasting surface.
  - Letters or graphics mounted, carved, or painted on a contrasting surface that forms the outline of the sign.
  - Non-illuminated letters or graphics painted or mounted directly on an interior window surface. Interior window signs should not exceed the lesser of 10 square feet or 30% of the area of the window in which it is mounted.
  - Architecturally integrated sign boards.
- The following are prohibitions regarding signage:
  - Box and cabinet signs shall not be used.
  - No signs, except flags and pedestrian signs, shall be suspended by chains or other devices that would allow the sign to swing due to wind action. Signs shall be anchored to prevent any lateral movement that would cause wear on the sign face or supporting members or connections.
- All electrical transformer boxes and raceways should be concealed from public view. If a raceway cannot be mounted internally— behind the finished exterior wall – the exposed metal surfaces of the raceway shall be finished to match the background wall, or integrated into the overall design of the sign.
- All exposed conduits shall be concealed from public view.

## 5.6 Surrounding Environment

Residential and commercial uses may exist in close proximity in Balcones Heights. Minimizing the impact that signs have, beyond their intended purpose, allows this mix of uses to coexist and enhances the overall character of the district.

- Signs should be designed and located so that they have little or no impact on adjacent residential neighborhoods.

- Signs should be designed and located so that they have little or no impact on adjacent residential neighborhoods.

## **Chapter 6: Townhouse and Mid-rise Housing**

A successful community includes a strong and attractive residential base with enough density to support commercial activity. The Balcones Heights Master Plan envisions accomplishing this goal through the development of multi-family, mid-rise housing and townhomes in addition to residential possibilities within mixed-use areas and the Crossroads District.

The proposed townhouse and mid-rise areas identified by the Master Plan are intended to be developed on a block by block or multiple block basis, as well through redevelopment on a site by site basis. This type of development should reflect the residential qualities that are desired in a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood and integrated as part of a total environment that reflects a more urban character.

The design guidelines are intended to promote quality private sector residential investment in any area of the City that is appropriate for townhouse and mid-rise housing. Whether in the Gentleman Road District or adjacent to the Fredericksburg Road corridor, it promotes stability and attractiveness in a unique living environment that offers a variety of housing opportunities, and it promotes population growth in Balcones Heights.

### **6.1 Housing Density and Types**

Greater density accommodates more residents to be within walking distance to the amenities, services, and stores in Balcones Heights. Mixing densities of residential uses adds economic diversity to the community, creates options for different lifestyles or life stages, and establishes long-term stability in the City.

- Townhouses are single-family, attached housing units. They are multi-story, have a relatively small building footprint and width, and are set fairly close to the street. The small footprint and density of townhouses allows it to be within walking of transit, business and entertainment areas of the city, yet well-appointed enough to attract middle to upper income residents to the city.
  
- Mid-rise housing is a multi-story housing building or complex, typically greater than four stories in height. Units may be owned or leased. Mid-rises generally have a relatively large building footprint, with multiple housing units on each floor. Because this housing type is at a high density, the price of the land is shared by multiple units. This makes the price of housing more affordable.

## 6.2 Building Setbacks

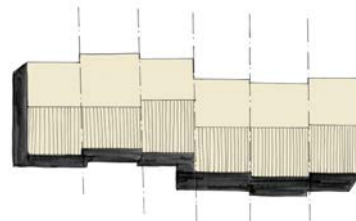
The public street is the primary place for community interaction. Setbacks smaller than typical suburban residential streets allow buildings to frame the street and create a pedestrian-friendly environment. Setback requirements are as follows:

- For townhouses, front yard setbacks and side yard setbacks for corner lots shall be a minimum of ten (10) feet and a maximum of twenty (20) feet. Unenclosed porch, entries and porticos may extend five (5) feet into front yard setback, but no closer than 10 feet from the property line.
- Side yard setbacks shall be zero (0) feet for townhomes. However, end unit townhomes shall be set back a minimum six (6) feet from the side property line.
- Front and side yard setbacks for mid-rise housing shall be 20 feet. Balconies and patios shall not extend into the setback.

## 6.3 Orientation to the Street

The use of porches, front doors, and windows into living quarters can reinforce a “sense of community” and add the perception of safety to the pedestrian environment.

- The site plan configuration for a development parcel shall create a strongly defined street presence. All residential structures shall front the street. Townhouses shall incorporate front porches and similar architectural elements. Mid-rise units shall have an entrance canopy and other architectural elements that engage the pedestrian environment.
- Residential structures should engage the street, providing the massing and building form that helps define the block, but variations on setbacks should be allowed among the townhouses and mid-rise residential units. These slight variations help to reduce the scale of multiple unit development, provide visual interest, provide a sense of entry and transition from the street, and allow landscaping.
- Uninterrupted groupings of attached townhouse units should not exceed six units in width with a minimum separation of twelve (12) feet between groupings. This includes a minimum of six (6) feet at the end of each grouping and the property line.





- For townhouses or mid-rise residential, site plan configurations and building designs that create blank walls along public streets or the orientation of front doors so they are not visible from the street are not acceptable.
- The front entry of townhouses shall incorporate an unenclosed porch, covered stoop, portico, or awning of not less than 4 ft by 4 ft. A “useable” front porch, 4 feet by 8 feet or greater, is preferred.

## **6.4 Garages, Parking Areas and Driveways**

Emphasis on pedestrian activities is supported by de-emphasizing structures and facilities designed solely for automobiles. Economical use of these structures and facilities can place priority on the design of usable space for people.

- Garages and parking areas shall not be emphasized along street frontage. Attached or detached garages in the rear yard with access to mid-block streets or private shared driveways along the rear of the property are preferred.
- For multifamily dwellings, parking areas shall be behind the dwellings. Such garages and parking areas may only be accessed via drives located in the rear yard leading from mid-block streets or private shared driveways along the rear of the property.

## **6.5 Scale**

The relative size or mass of a building in relation to adjacent buildings is one of the primary ways to achieve design in higher density housing. Attention to building scale in this district allows a variety of residential uses to coexist in the same neighborhood and presents a consistent contour on the public streets.

- Townhouses shall not exceed three stories plus an occupied attic (3 ½ stories) in height.
- Dormers are allowed.
- Townhouses shall have a sloped roof. The structure shall not exceed 45 feet in height.
- For townhouses, a garage footprint shall not exceed 625 sq ft per unit. Garages in rear yards may have an occupied second floor when allowed by the City’s zoning ordinance. A one-story garage shall be no taller than 1 ½ stories or 20 ft in height. A two-story garage shall be no taller than 30 feet in height.

Any other accessory structure is subject to the requirements of applicable zoning and site development regulations.

## **6.6 Materials**

The use of quality materials for a variety of residential structures can allow diverse dwelling opportunities to coexist in a single neighborhood, while preserving the value of private investments in the Gentleman Road District.

- Preferred dominant materials for residential structures may be brick, stone, cementous lap siding or stucco. Concrete masonry units may not be used on residential buildings.
- All garages and accessory structures shall be constructed of the same materials as the residential structure.

## **Chapter 7: Parks, Open Space, and Trails System**

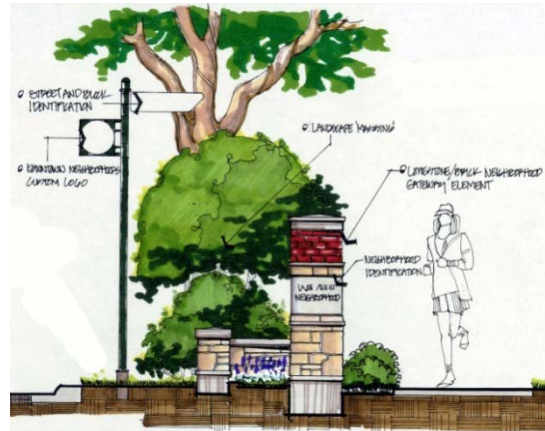
Balcones Heights, as part of its redevelopment agenda, will need to integrate an open space/parks/trails element in order to provide the community, its businesses, residents and visitors, with a well planned, designed, and maintained environment. The inclusion of distinctive parks, open space, plazas, and trails, as thoughtfully planned “people places”, will define the community. These people places, both public and private, are to be key elements in economic revitalization and economic sustainability for the city in the future.



### 7.1 Purpose

This Master Plan provides strategic recommendations for an integrated parks, open space, and trails system that will work in unison with the future development and redevelopment of the community.

Long range planning for Balcones Heights in general, and parks and trails specifically, has taken an approach that is atypical to a standard planning format. The community's context within a large metropolitan area, its land use pattern, demographics, and the opportunities that have presented themselves have all contributed to the direction taken for the strategic recommendations. In most cases, urban park system planning is based on the delivery of a comprehensive offering of parks and recreation services, to include community parks, neighborhood parks, sports fields, swimming pools, recreation centers, and trails. However, because of Balcones Heights' unique physical, land use, and demographic situation, **this plan targets parks and trails recommendations to address the issues that best benefit the community over the long term, not based on national standards or even trends**, such as park acreage-to-population ratios, park dedication requirements based on residential units, or distance limits between parks. These types of standards are not geared to effectively address the residential and commercial real estate characteristics and conditions that exist in Balcones Heights, nor would they be effective tools to produce the desired effect.



As vital congregation areas and links, parks and trails will be incorporated into the transit systems and corridors, both vehicular and pedestrian. The spaces and linkages created will be important connectivity segments in the new comprehensive transportation





theme for Balcones Heights. A comprehensive parks, open space, and trails system, **which includes both public and private property**, builds economic value in a community, enhances aesthetic content, provides greater mobility, and creates recreational outlets for the citizenry and visitors to the community.

## 7.2 Current Conditions

There are currently two small neighborhood parks in the city of Balcones Heights, totaling less than one acre. The amenities available consist of limited play and park equipment. While serving the neighborhoods and residential population to a limited degree, these properties do little in regard to providing aesthetic or economic vitality to the community. There is also utilization of the Crossroads Mall property as an occasional special event venue. In reality, residents take advantage of the close proximity to regional and community parks that are available within the metropolitan area provided by other agencies. This plan does not suggest duplicating facilities or services found within the accessible metropolitan area.



*Current Conditions of Park on Pleasant Drive and Vivian Lane*

Real estate to expand the amount of park/open space in traditional ways is virtually unavailable. Vacant publicly owned property is limited within the city, but utilization of this property as part of the open space and trail system is possible. The current public park space has no relationship to major street corridors, pedestrian routes, or any land use other than residential. Other than the outdoor performing area at Crossroads Mall, no publically accessible outdoor space exists which allows for congregation, performances, events, or public markets.

As a city that can position itself with a character all its own, the publicly accessible places created can transform the image of the community with an unlimited offering of events, concerts, and scheduled public markets that attract people to the urban center area from outside the community, especially in light of the potential for improved mobility created by Bus Rapid Transit. These types of events also attract people who desire to reside in this type of setting, which is centered on the transit oriented theme to live, work,



and enjoy leisure time within a comprehensive environment, which should include publicly and privately owned parks, courtyards, and plazas which support activities and events, as well as, passive spaces.

In regard to the current condition of the primary corridors in the city, there are no open spaces, parks, plazas, or trails available for pedestrians, either publicly or privately owned. Within the city, drainage channels and rights-of-way exist which could be used to link neighborhoods to the urban center along Fredericksburg Road. These connections, if expanded to the south, can increase the accessible population in San Antonio to the Fredericksburg Road development corridor and the corresponding transit system.

### **7.3 Parks, Open Space, and Trails Goals**

Balcones Heights will need to address its lack of publicly accessible places as part of the rebranding process to make it a more pedestrian-oriented community. The inclusion of a comprehensive parks, open space, and trails system, as part of this new urban planning approach, will greatly assist in meeting the intentions of this endeavor. Parks, open space, and trails improve a community's economic position, enhance aesthetics, increase mobility, and provide attractions and recreational opportunities. In addition, a connectivity plan that links assets, destinations, and neighborhoods through improved alternative transportation modes makes for a greatly improved urban environment.

The comprehensive parks, open space, and trails system should accomplish the following goals.

- **GOAL 1: Create a network of parks of various scales in commercial and residential zones.** Well planned and designed park and open space systems offer a variety of places with differing sizes, functions, and even ownership. This is true no matter the size of the community. While neighborhood parks, such as those that currently exist in Balcones Heights, serve children and families in the immediate area, urban parks and plazas provide a variety of places that should include intimate spaces, as well as, support regional and neighborhood activities and events. The inclusion of gathering places and activities for people utilizing mass transit, enjoying their surroundings, shopping, jogging, or walking their pet, creates an environment conducive to urban life. The availability of these spaces and functions is critical to the attraction of residents and visitors to the community. Both public and private properties and developments should be included in a comprehensive park and open space system. Improvement to the existing park areas needs to be included.
- **GOAL 2: Create a regionally linked, community-wide, multipurpose trail system.** Because of the need to connect the communities in Balcones Heights

to the city's urban and transit center, a linkage network of trails and walkways will be needed. Recreational use of trails is also a major objective. This trail system will access existing but underutilized infrastructure (i.e., drainage channels, rights-of-way, sidewalks, surplus public property, existing parking, etc.). Public and private properties should be explored and future developments should participate in a comprehensive approach to this trail system, which should extend under I-10 to the east and into San Antonio. Tree planting and landscaping are key elements in this pedestrian system, helping to create a well delineated and comfortable route.

- **GOAL 3: Develop a park/trail theme, as well as, a signage and wayfinding system that is compatible with the City's comprehensive signage system.** A park and trail system should portray the image of the community that it serves. Signage, landscaping, paving systems, and public art/design enhancement can create a theme that is unique to the City. This system will orient users to locales, provide interpretive elements, and be coordinated with vehicular signage. This theme should be integrated and compatible with the transit system signage and wayfinding, as much as possible.
- **GOAL 4: Develop and utilize generally accepted practices for park development and programming.** The city should use processes to gather public opinion and preferences regarding parks and how they are, or can be, used. This is to include long range planning, capital improvement programs, recreation programs, special events, and other areas of public interest. These processes are extremely valuable in dealing with local, state, and federal agencies and in creating public interest and excitement about living, working, and investing in the community. Volunteer programs and use of donated property/facilities should also be actively explored.

## 7.4 Recommendations

**The Parks, Open Space, and Trail System Goals are to be** addressed through a set of recommendations that are tailored to each goal and are consistent with the overall planning elements of this Master Plan. The overwhelming fact that the publicly owned properties will not solely be capable of addressing this aspect of the plan further reinforces the need for private property participation and public/private ventures. This approach must utilize city development requirements that create places for the public.

**Recommendations for GOAL I: Create a network of parks of various scales in commercial and residential zones.**

- Recognize the attributes, weaknesses, and potential for public spaces within the community that includes the various options on park type, real estate situations, and development options.
- Identify park types to be created based on location.
- In conjunction with property owners, managers, and residents, create potential event/entertainment scenarios that highlight the community; define the facility and location match-ups to successfully produce these events; engage VIA in this on-going dialog.
- Identify the appropriate funding and development process tools available and preferred (i.e. unrestricted funds, property and sales tax programs/bonds, hotel occupancy tax, grants, private and public/private agreements).
- Develop the core of Balcones Heights with an integrated series of plazas, landscaped gathering and seating areas, and multipurpose space for events and markets; coordinate this in conjunction with adjacent business/residential interests with connectivity to transit; evaluate the current outdoor spaces and enhance or replace as real estate development occurs.
- Create a transit system interface by developing landscaped “people places” along the corridors and the BRT Transfer Station; locate landscaped gathering/setting areas for transit users.
- In anticipation of the transition of the urban center and street corridors, public activities for adjacent residents, such as



walking/jogging, pet management, wi-fi courtyards, and acoustic performances, should be programmed on a scheduled basis in order to attract and retain locals.

- Business interaction with public spaces needs to be planned and encouraged; food courts, displays, and cafés, whether on public or private property, will create the activity and atmosphere desired in the urban setting.
- Secure ownership or management of surplus TxDOT property east of I-10 and create landscaped open space with “Gateway” entrance into the City.
- Explore the establishment of temporary or permanent donations that can support pedestrian friendly programs, such as “Adopt-a-Park”, “Pavement to Parks”, and other pocket park opportunities.
- Redefine the function and appearance of the existing neighborhood parks in the city.

**Recommendations for GOAL 2: Create a regionally linked, community-wide, multipurpose trail system.**

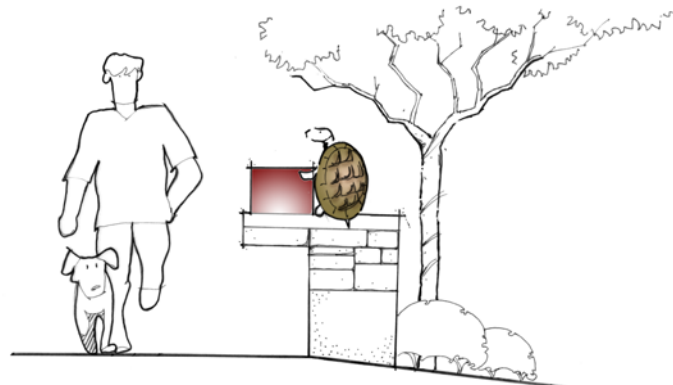
- Utilize existing drainage channels, rights-of-way, sidewalks, and parking, to create the pedestrian system needed to provide linkage between the urban center/BRT Transfer Station/corridors and the surrounding neighborhoods and locales.
- Coordinate with VIA for the bicycle amenities that will be available for transit users (i.e. bike racks on busses, bike lockers at transfer stations, and discount passes); promote those services and transit information to residents.
- Coordinate with property owners regarding access to trails and shared use of parking to ensure efficiency.
- Plan trail connections and amenities with residential developments; market this system to prospective tenants.
- Extend the trails system underneath I-10 to connect to east Balcones Heights; improve appearance of the underpass with lighting, landscaping, and pavers to encourage use and improve perception; secure ownership or agreement to landscape the TxDOT right-of-way east of I-10 and develop the entrance into

Balcones Heights and improve connection to east Balcones Heights' neighborhoods, businesses, schools, and churches.

- Extend the trail system south into San Antonio to connect to additional neighborhoods and develop a longer recreational trail for walkers/joggers.
- Manage a “pet friendly” trail system; include disposable waste bags along the trails.
- Establish use policies on trails that include pet regulations.
- Plant street trees along trails that follow rights-of-way to delineate routes and provide a feeling of security; utilize corporate, volunteer, and tree donation programs to install and maintain the street tree program.

**Recommendations for GOAL 3: Develop a park/trail theme, as well as, a signage and wayfinding system that is compatible with the city’s comprehensive signage system.**

- A theme that is unique to Balcones Heights will be used in public parks and trails, to include signage, street furniture, landscaping, lighting, and paving.
- Interpretive information will be included in the wayfinding signage, including points of interest, history, and elements that portray the image of the city.



*Interpretative Signage and Sculpture along Trail*

- Incorporate art and design enhancement wherever feasible. Redefine the function and appearance of the existing neighborhood parks in the city.
- Designs will be created, consistent, and coordinated.
- Signage and wayfinding systems should be coordinated with TxDOT and VIA to ensure compatibility in design and information, as much as possible.
- Gateway entrances with landscaping and lighting will be created along the corridors into the city.

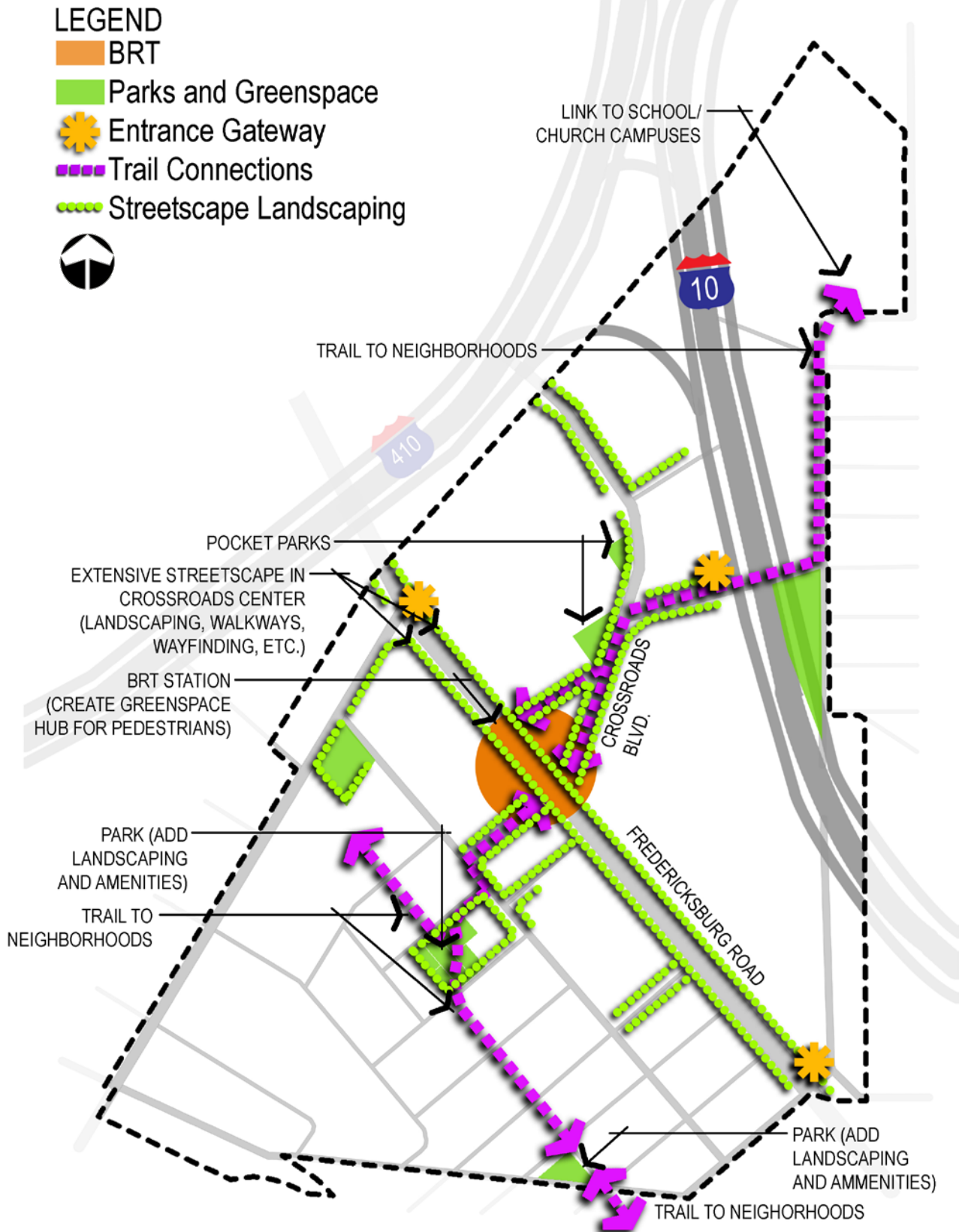


**Recommendations for GOAL 4: Develop and utilize generally accepted practices for park planning, development, and programming.**

- The City of Balcones Heights should review the strategies set forth in this plan as to the status, effectiveness, and appropriateness of the recommendations on an annual basis.
- Public processes should be used regularly to assist the City in reaching consensus on actions regarding parks and public places.
- Surveys to evaluate public and property owner opinions should be initiated in some form on a two-year cycle; topics can range from park improvements desired for a particular park to preferred special events to be conducted during the summer. These surveys can be integrated into other correspondence shared between the City and its citizens, such as utility bills or property evaluations.
- Develop adopt-a-park or other volunteer programs to engage the citizenry in their park system. This fosters a sense of ownership in the system.
- Monitor and acquire park, open space, and trail properties as they arise in the priority areas.
- As need for park development arises, prepare and utilize master plans and design standards in conjunction with affected property owners, citizens, and potential partners in order to ensure a cohesive approach to urban planning.
- Evaluate and access funding sources available to acquire, develop, and maintain park facilities.
- Evaluate grant program opportunities and submit for funding, where appropriate.
- Designate staff to manage and maintain parks, open space, and trails to acceptable standards.

# Master Plan

## City of Balcones Heights



*Open Space and Trails*

## **Chapter 8: Strategies and Tools**

In order to make this master plan a reality, many well-coordinated actions in the public and private sectors will need to take place. When implementing a plan, it is important to consider: organization, management and promotion; planning, development and redevelopment strategies; and the relevant tools and incentives to promote appropriate development.

### **8.1 Organization, Management and Promotion**

Organizing for success is one of the prime activities that must take place for Balcones Heights to attract new forms of development and change its image. Some of the organizational activities must occur within city government, such as the formation of a professional staff to conduct planning and zoning administration. Currently, Balcones Heights does not have adequate staff to support the necessary planning and economic development activities to implement the development concept plan. Other activities are appropriately undertaken by private or not-for-profit organizations, like an enhanced merchants' and property owners' association. Still other activities can be placed in either the public or not-for-profit sectors, like the creation of an economic development entity. The following represent the key entities that should be created:

#### **Professional Planning and Zoning Staff**

If master planning implementation is successful, there will be an abundance of development, redevelopment, and renovation initiatives, as well as applications for zoning approval and building permits. This is a function that belongs as part of the city regulatory and review process. Currently, the City inspects property for compliance with building and property codes, but it has no professional urban planning staff.

A smoothly functioning regulatory review process requires professional staff opinions and recommendations to be given to both the planning and zoning commission and city council. Initially, this function could be conducted by retaining a planning consultant to render opinions on the City's behalf, but the work volume will ultimately require a permanent staff.

Some cities, particularly smaller ones, combine planning and building code enforcement into a single department. Others separate these functions into separate departments. The skills and knowledge involved in planning and zoning administration are quite different from those involved with building code enforcement. The first involves formal urban planning education (typically, an accredited urban planning degree) and professional planning experience. The second involves knowledge and experience with building and site construction.

### **Economic Development Entity**

The promotion of economic development must be cooperative, but kept separated from the City's regulatory function. Development promotion involves marketing/advertising, an understanding of real estate economics, expertise in the packaging of development incentives, and the art of "deal making." Regulation, as undertaken by a planning staff, involves the enforcement of ordinances to protect the health, safety and welfare of the citizenry.

Some cities have an active program of development promotion and assistance within city government, such as an economic development department or commission. Others rely on the creation of a not-for-profit entity to work with the city to undertake these activities, such as an economic development corporation. Still other communities rely on existing local or regional associations, such as a chamber of commerce, to promote development. In any of these cases, the activities must be led by an experienced economic development professional.

### **Merchants'/Property Owners' Association**

An enhanced merchants' and property owners' association can act to coordinate, organize, and promote business activities in Balcones Heights. Quite different from an economic development entity, this association can address joint advertising for area businesses, help establish uniform retail hours, coordinate special events, establish of common maintenance and storefront display standards, and conduct business owners' educational programs. In some instances, these not-for-profit organizations can receive grants to assist with maintenance operations.

## **8.2 Planning, Development, and Redevelopment Strategies**

Once administrative and promotional organizations are put in place, there are a number of activities that must be undertaken. The following matrix suggests many of the essential actions and strategies for the master plan to be implemented. Actions are listed and prioritized as short term (less than 1 year), middle range (1 to 3 years), long term (over 3 years), and ongoing (continuous, with no specific completion date). The primary participants for each action are also listed.

## Implementation Strategies Matrix

| <b>Strategy</b>  | <b>Short term<br/>(&lt;1 year)</b> | <b>Mid-range<br/>(1 – 3 year)</b> | <b>Long-range<br/>(&gt;3years)</b> | <b>Ongoing</b> | <b>Participants</b>  |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|--|
| <b>Adopt/Revise Balcones Heights Zoning Ordinance</b>  | ●                                  |                                   |                                    |                | City   |
| <b>Retain Professional Planning Staff</b> ( <i>zoning, and guidelines administration, may initially be a consultant</i> )                      | ●                                  |                                   |                                    | ●              | City   |
| <b>Form Economic Development Entity/EDC</b> ( <i>development attraction packaging incentives</i> )   | ●                                  |                                   |                                    |                | City   |
| <b>Work with Existing Property and Business Owners on Building Renovation and Additions</b>  | ●                                  |                                   |                                    | ●              | City, EDC  |
| <b>Work with VIA and TxDOT on potential BRT Program</b> ( <i>station location, geometric design, signalization, landscape coordination</i> )   | ●                                  | ●                                 | ●                                  |                | City, VIA, TxDOT   |
| <b>Attract Developers or Master Developer for Key Station TOD Projects, if applicable</b>  |                                    | ●                                 |                                    | ●              | EDC, City  |
| <b>Create Enhanced Merchants'/ Property Owners' Association</b> ( <i>business promotion, advertising, education, management, maintenance</i> ) |                                    | ●                                 |                                    |                | City, Merchants, Property Owners, EDC                      |
| <b>Plan and Implement Detailed Streetscape Plan for Fredericksburg Road</b> ( <i>2012 Completion</i> )   |                                    | ●                                 | ●                                  |                | City, Merchants'/ Property Owners' Association             |
| <b>Plan and Implement Comprehensive Signage/Wayfinding System</b> ( <i>2012 Completion</i> )   | ●                                  | ●                                 |                                    |                | City, TxDOT, VIA   |
| <b>Plan and Implement a Parks and Trails System</b>  |                                    |                                   | ●                                  | ●              | City   |
| <b>Coordinate with Property Owners along Fredericksburg Road on Transit and Streetscape Construction Issues</b>                                |                                    | ●                                 | ●                                  |                | VIA, TxDOT, Ombudsman, City                                |
| <b>Work with Affected Property Owners with Regard to Displaced Parking due to Roadway Changes</b>  |                                    | ●                                 | ●                                  |                | City, TxDOT, VIA, Merchants'/ Property Owners' Association |
| <b>Promote New Townhouse and Mid-rise Housing Development</b>  |                                    |                                   | ●                                  | ●              | EDC  |
| <b>Initiate Programs for Existing Home Owners</b> ( <i>renovation workshops, dealing with property tax implications</i> )                      |                                    |                                   | ●                                  | ●              | EDC, City  |
| <b>Attract New Residents and Businesses to Balcones Heights</b>  |                                    |                                   | ●                                  | ●              | Merchants/ Property Owners' Association, EDC               |



## **8.3 Implementation Tools**

A variety of implementation programs are available to Texas communities. The following represents a sampling of financing and implementation tools that may support economic development, infrastructure development, parks and trails development, community services, street maintenance, job creation, affordable housing, security services, and business services, such as marketing and advertising in Balcones Heights. The City will need to evaluate the applicability of these economic development tools for specific projects identified in the master plan.

Unless otherwise noted, additional information may be obtained on these programs from the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts. More complete program descriptions can be found at [www.window.state.tx.us](http://www.window.state.tx.us).

Three types of programs are described:

- Property Tax Based Programs
- Sales Tax Based Programs
- Special Assessments and Other Incentives (including grants)

### **Property Tax Based Programs**

#### **Value Limitation & Tax Credits**

##### **Chapter 313, Tax Code**

An appraised value limitation is an agreement in which a taxpayer agrees to build or install property and create jobs in exchange for an eight-year limitation on the taxable property value for school district maintenance and operations tax (M&O) purposes. The minimum limitation varies by school district. The application for a limitation on the appraised value for M&O purposes is submitted directly to the school district and may require an application fee, which is established by each school district.

#### **Tax Abatement Act**

##### **Chapter 312, Tax Code**

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 10 years. School districts may not enter into abatement agreements. Each taxing unit that wants to consider tax abatement proposals must adopt guidelines and criteria for the creation of a reinvestment zone and must hold a public hearing. After these steps are complete, the taxing unit may, by official action, designate a zone.

**Tax Increment Financing**  
**Chapter 311, Tax Code**

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a tool that local governments can use to publicly finance needed structural improvements and enhanced infrastructure within a reinvestment zone.

A reinvestment zone can be initiated by petition of the affected property owners, or a municipality can initiate a reinvestment zone without the need for a petition. Restrictions on the creation of a reinvestment zone include:

- No more than 10 percent of the property may be used for residential purposes (does not apply if the district is created by a petition of the landowners).
- May not contain property that cumulatively would exceed 15 percent of the total appraised property value within the city and its industrial districts.
- May not create 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.

**Sales Tax Based Programs**

**Development Corporation Act of 1979**  
**Article 5190.6, Vernon's Texas Civil Statutes**

For both 4A and 4B corporations, the Development Corporation Act requires cities to establish a corporation to administer the sales and use tax funds, and city voters must approve this special, dedicated tax at an election held for that purpose.

All cities located in a county with a population of less than 500,000 may impose the tax under 4A if the new combined local sales tax rate would not exceed 2 percent. 4A sales tax can be used for manufacturing and industrial facilities; research and development facilities; recycling facilities; distribution centers; small warehouse facilities and distribution centers; military facilities; primary job training facilities; corporate headquarters facilities; job training classes; career centers; telephone call centers; business infrastructure; airport facilities (new as of 2007); and operation of commuter rail, light rail or commuter buses (new as of 2007).

All cities are eligible to adopt the 4B tax if the combined local sales tax rate would not exceed 2 percent. 4B sales tax can be used for the same purposes as listed for 4A. In addition, 4B can also fund retail business incentives (if city population is less than 20,000); sports and athletic facilities; entertainment, tourist and convention facilities; public parks and related open space improvements; affordable housing; and water supply and conservation programs (with special voter approval).

## **Enterprise Zones**

### **Chapter 2303, Government Code**

The Texas Enterprise Zone Program is an economic development tool for local communities to partner with the State of Texas to promote job creation and capital investment in economically distressed areas of the state. The Comptroller's office administers Enterprise Zone refunds of state sales and use tax (Section 151.429, Tax Code).

## **Sales and Use Tax for Street Maintenance**

### **Section 327.004, Tax Code**

Many Texas cities do not have the funds necessary to repair existing roads. Recognizing this, the 77th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 445 in 2001, adding Chapter 327, Tax Code, Municipal Sales and Use Tax for Street Maintenance. Section 327.004, Tax Code, allows cities to raise their local sales tax rate by one-eighth of one percent or one-fourth of one percent if the funds are dedicated to street maintenance and repair. Cities may impose the tax, with voter approval, if the new, combined local sales tax rate will not exceed two percent.

## **Special Assessments and Other Incentives**

### **Public Improvement Districts (PIDs)**

#### **Chapter 372, Local Government Code**

PIDs offer cities a means for improving their infrastructure to promote economic growth in an area. The Public Improvement District Assessment Act allows cities and counties to levy and collect special assessments on properties that are within the city or its extraterritorial jurisdiction.

PIDs may be formed to create water, wastewater, 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 or similar improvements; supplemental safety services for the improvement of the district, including public safety and security services; or supplemental business-related services for the improvement of the district, including advertising and business recruitment and development.

### **Municipal Management Districts**

#### **Chapter 375, Local Government Code**

These districts, also called downtown management districts, are created within an existing commercial area to finance facilities, infrastructure, and services beyond those

already provided by individual property owners or the municipality. The improvements may be paid for by self-imposed property taxes, special assessments and impact fees, or by other charges on district property owners. The creation of the district does not relieve a city from providing basic services to the area. A district is created to supplement, not supplant, the municipal services available to the area.

**Neighborhood Empowerment Zones**  
**Chapter 378, Local Government Code**

A Neighborhood Empowerment Zone is a designated area within a municipality that is created to promote one or more of the following: affordable housing; an increase in economic development; an increase in the quality of social services, education or public safety; or the rehabilitation of affordable housing in the zone.

**Downtown Revitalization Program**  
**The Texas Capital Fund**

The Texas Capital Fund is a key source of state grants for downtown redevelopment and revitalization. Administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture, the program has two major municipal grant programs: Downtown Revitalization Grants (DRG) and Infrastructure Development Grants (IDG). Both may be used for sidewalk construction, utility infrastructure improvements, traffic signals and signs, and purchasing land needed for public facilities. DRG grant awards range from \$50,000 to \$150,000, while IDGs are funded in amounts up to \$1 million

**Parks and Trails**  
**Texas Parks and Wildlife Grants**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) administers the Texas Recreation and Parks Account. Funded by a percentage of the state sales tax generated through the sales of sporting goods, this program provides funding for the acquisition of land and construction and improvement of recreational sites in five categories: Urban Indoor, Urban Outdoor, Indoor Facility, Outdoor and Small Community. All grants require a 50 percent local match.